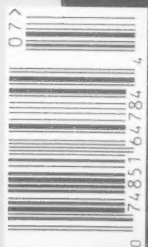


# THE Times AFTER THE STORM

# CJR

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# CJR

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—From the founding editorial, 1961

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**THE END**  
Howell Raines announces to the newsroom on June 5 that he's resigning as executive editor of *The New York Times*. Behind him, wearing suspenders, is the newspaper's publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. At right, arms folded, is Gerald Boyd, managing editor, who also left the paper over the Jayson Blair scandal.

COVER: MICHAEL MABRY  
ABOVE: FRED R. CONRAD/THE NEW YORK TIMES





## CJR OPENING SHOT

### After the Perfect Storm

nemies of *The New York Times*, and there are indeed a few of them, have been dancing in the aisles lately, clapping and praying for more coals on the *Times*'s head. William Kristol, for example, in *The Weekly Standard*, argued that "everything we know" about the *Times* publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., "suggests his next pick would be no improvement." Kristol went on to paint a caricature of the *Times*, turning every mole on the Gray Lady into a hideous scar, and to call for her permanent demise. Dream on, Mr. Kristol. As painful as the process may be, the *Times* will emerge stronger from the perfect storm that followed Jayson Blair, and will remain the nation's most thorough and thoughtful newspaper for the foreseeable future. This is not to say that the paper of record does not have serious

problems with its internal culture and processes and attitudes (read arrogance) that go beyond Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd. Or that the reverberations of the Blair affair don't affect the rest of us. We explore some of those reverberations here, starting on page fourteen. Then, on page thirty-four, Scott Sherman takes a long look at Seymour Hersh, whom some call our premier investigative reporter and whom our current president once called a liar. We hope that our cover piece on page twenty-four, "Rethinking Objectivity," by managing editor Brent Cunningham, opens a dialogue about a bedrock journalistic value that is not as clearly defined, and not always as useful, as we tend to believe. We encourage you to respond to the piece, and to anything else in the magazine, at [cjr@columbia.edu](mailto:cjr@columbia.edu).

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## EASY GRADER?

I taught English in New York City public high schools for over a decade and know that all grading is ultimately subjective, but I question Terence Smith's criteria for judging how the America media covered the Iraq war in his article "Hard Lessons" (CJR, May/June). He acknowledges that most media saw issues from the American viewpoint and operated as cheerleaders. He gave them a grade of C-. In the high school where I taught, students could graduate with C- grades. I'd grade TV coverage an F.

GARY M. STERN  
New York, New York

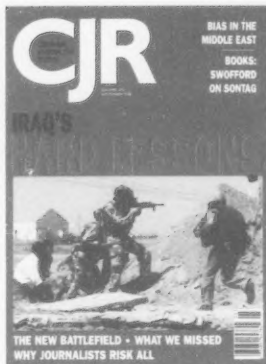
## EMBEDDED LESSON

In his May/June piece on his experience in Iraq, Bob Arnot offered a key insight that I wonder if he or any other practicing journalist in the United States fully grasped. Arnot was surprised, he wrote, to see how much his story was enriched when he would "find an old metered cab, and drive around town," in order to understand what problems confronted the average Iraqi.

Those of us who have been concerned with the decline of the press in the United States have been imploring journalists to get out of their offices, out of the bubble, and walk around their communities to get a sense of the concerns of the folks in their community.

Journalists should not have to experience a war to make this connection.

CHRISTOPHER S. KELLEY  
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Miami University  
Oxford, Ohio



## REALITY TV NEWS

It's no wonder that Orville Schell's best broadcast students don't want to work in most commercial stations (CJR, March/April). Instead of training them to become Fred Friendlys, perhaps he should teach them what twenty-first century broadcast reporting is all about.

First of all, he shouldn't fill their heads with the myth that in-depth TV reporting used to be the norm, which now has been corrupted by the bottom line. It never was the norm. Jobs like that were slim forty years ago, and they're still slim today, although with outlets like investigative units, cable documentary networks, PBS, and the *60 Minutes* clones, I'd warrant there are more opportunities now than when I started thirty-five years ago.

In-depth reporting on a commercial newscast was recently attempted in Chicago, and it flopped. The fatal flaw? We are a linear medium with a mass audience. No matter how well it's done, a five-minute report on Chicago's schools isn't going to interest those in the suburbs. They'll "flip the page" by turning to another channel.

Finally, it's obvious that Schell has never had the thrill of doing a live shot on twenty

minutes' notice, or producing a package in half a day. Sure, it's not *Nightline*. But you know what? If it's done right, it's the essence of what journalism's always been in this country: Get the facts. Get them fast. And tell the story. If that doesn't interest you, there's always magazine writing.

Too few in our business do commercial TV journalism well. Too many do it poorly. But whose fault is that? Perhaps it's the fault of J-school deans whose "best students" somehow got the impression that it's not worth doing in the first place.

ROBERT LUTHER RAY  
Producer, WMAQ-TV  
Chicago, Illinois

## LEGAL THREAT

Re: Douglas McCollam's article about international libel suits against journalistic Web sites (CJR, May/June):

The problem is not just that cyber-journalists based in Western countries may face lawsuits in dictatorial nations with draconian libel laws simply because their articles may be downloaded abroad. Worse, harsh libel judgments in repressive countries may be honored by dozens of other nations around the world as a matter of routine custom in international law. Thus the legal risk greatly increases for all journalists whose articles are posted on the Internet.

The potential effect could be to transform libel law at an international level, with standards set not by countries with the freest media laws but by those with the most oppressive ones.

MARK FELDSTEIN  
Associate professor  
Media & Public Affairs  
George Washington University  
Washington, D.C.

# FCC: READY, SET, CONSOLIDATE

*The new rules are awful, but the fight is far from over*

BY NEIL HICKEY

**T**he big guys will get bigger and the little guys will have to decide whether they want to exist anymore." That thumbnail synopsis from a Wall Street analyst at the Sanford C. Bernstein firm says a great deal about how the FCC's revised rules on media ownership, handed down on June 2, may affect the way Americans get their news.

The battle over the rule changes raged for eighteen months, with media companies lobbying fiercely for relaxation, or even elimination, of ownership regulations. Consumer advocates waged a spirited but unsuccessful defense. The oddest of bedfellows joined forces to fight the proposed changes. On the right: the National Rifle Association, Family Research Council, Parents Television Council; on the left: Common Cause, Consumers Union, NOW. ("A dark day for democracy," said Common Cause's president.) Legislators, from Mississippi's Trent Lott to North Carolina's Ernest Hollings, demanded that the rules be left in place. More than 750,000 messages from angry citizens and groups clogged the FCC's mailroom and e-mail servers.

But FCC Chairman Michael Powell's mind was made up. He and his two Republican colleagues on the commission — amid bitter dissents from the two Democratic members — greased the skids for the national TV networks to buy up more television stations than they already own, for media companies to own both newspapers and TV stations in the same market, and (among other changes) for one entity to own as many as three TV stations in the same area. Broadcasters see a triumph of the First Amendment in the FCC's action, as the government loosens its regulatory chains. The groups representing consumers consider it a body blow to the three defining public interest goals: diversity of views, competition, and healthy local news and commentary.

Federal limits on broadcasters' power in the U.S. have an honorable history, starting in the 1930s when dictatorships in Europe strangled dissent by monopolizing access to the public. The U.S. Supreme Court repeatedly has ruled that the public's First Amendment rights trump those of media corporations, and that placing reasonable limits on Big Media's capacity to conglomerate is justified to defend citizens' rights.

The FCC's June 2 action is part of a larger picture: a natural extension of the present administration's policies on taxation, the budget, and the environment, which have



supported the interests of the business community. Reed Hundt, a former FCC chairman, told *Salon* that the vote was less about principles of diversity, competition, and localism than an effort to strengthen a powerful alliance between the political right and Big Media.

Big Media worked hard for its victory. According to a report issued in late May by the Washington-based watchdog group The Center for Public Integrity, media companies spent \$2.8 million over the last eight years transporting FCC commissioners and their staffs, free of charge, to meetings in places like Paris, Honolulu, Las Vegas, Rio de Janeiro, and London. Chairman Powell was the leading beneficiary of the industry's largesse: forty-four trips costing \$84,921. The survey also noted that in the months leading up to June 2, FCC commissioners and their aides held seventy-one off-the-record meetings with broadcast executives, and only five with consumer advocates.

Broadcast and cable TV coverage of the crucial debate on media ownership in the months just before June 2 was disgracefully meager, when it wasn't brazenly pro-administration. (*The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* and Bill Moyers's *Now* were among the exceptions.)

The debate about media ownership, in fact, is not over — now that the waters have been roiled and the public is beginning to understand the stakes. In late June, a bipartisan group of Senate Commerce Committee members, in a rebuke to the FCC, approved legislation that would roll back much of the commission's deregulatory action of June 2. Challenges also will be brought in the Washington, D.C., Circuit Court of Appeals. The issue will be campaign fodder for the 2004 elections.

By law, the FCC is obliged to review the regulations every two years, and therefore this entire process will be reprised in 2005, perhaps with even more dramatic results. For now, many Big Media execs swear they won't rush out and hungrily swallow up media properties to boost their power and their revenues. ("We're going to take little bites," said a Tribune Company vice president.) But that misses the point. What we risk over the long haul is ownership creep that may eventually see the end of the few remaining rules, and with them, the public's right to the widest possible array of news and opinion — at which point, robust, independent, antagonistic, many-voiced journalism may be only a memory. ■

Neil Hickey is CJR's editor at large.

FRANK WHITELY



**DART** to *Rolling Stone*, for a journalistic mugging. Back in November, an impressive special report appeared in the *Philadelphia Daily News*. The result of a six-month effort that involved the Freedom of Information Act and drew on court transcripts, medical bills, police and prison records, and numerous interviews, the report retraced the course of a 1999 random shooting on a southwest Philadelphia street in order to tally the cost of the incident, both to the people directly affected and to Pennsylvania taxpayers. The *News*'s findings were summed up in its title: *The \$2 Million Bullet*. Four months later, in the March 6 issue of *Rolling Stone*, a piece appeared entitled "The Bullet and the Damage Done." Similar in concept and set in the same Philadelphia neighborhood and the same Philadelphia hospital, the *Rolling Stone* piece offered among its examples various facts and conclusions about the same random shooting and the "\$2 million bullet" that had been revealed in such hard-won detail by the local paper. Conspicuously not offered by the national magazine, however — editors had taken it out — was any acknowledgment of the source of its loot.

**DART** to *The Weekly Standard*, for cutting out the middle man. On March 11, the hot neoconservative magazine was featured in a *New York Times* article that drew on a range of comments solicited from Washington observers — among them, the liberal critic Eric Alterman, whose meticulously credited statements included this one: "Reader for reader, it may be the most influential publication in America." On March 24, the *Standard* began publishing a promotional house ad that prominently featured Alterman's words — prominently attributed to "The New York Times."

**LAUREL** to *The Wall Street Journal*, for examining some of the more pathological symptoms of the nation's failing health care system. First, on March 13, Lucette Lugnado exposed, through the case of Quinton White, a struggling seventy-seven-year-old working-class widower in Connecticut, the inhumane practices followed by hospitals in collecting patients' debts. Although twenty years have passed since the death of White's uninsured wife, the distinguished not-for-profit Yale-New Haven Hospital had been continuing its relentless pursuit of payment for her treatment. Tactics, not untypically, included putting a lien on White's modest house, attempting to seize all his meager savings, taking him to court to increase the monthly repayment plan he somehow managed to meet, and tacking onto the original \$18,740 bill — most of which by now he'd actually repaid — a crippling \$39,000 in additional fees and interest. Next, on March 17, Lugnado exposed, through the case of twenty-five-year-old Rebekah Nix, a magazine fact-checker in New York, the grossly inequitable practices followed by hospitals in calculating patients' bills. After an emergency appendectomy two years ago at the not-for-profit New York Methodist Hospital in Brooklyn,

the uninsured Nix was presented, again not untypically, with a crushing bill for \$14,000, plus doctors' fees — a far cry from what it routinely bills for the same procedure to Medicaid (\$5,000), Medicare (\$7,800), and HMOs (\$2,500). In the wake of Lugnado's inquiries, New York Methodist cut Nix's bill to \$5,000; Yale-New Haven ended White's ordeal by wiping away his debt, and later announced changes in some of its more heartless collection policies. But clearly the very deep sickness in the system itself is not so easily cured.

**DART** to Walter Cronkite, Morley Safer, and Aaron Brown, for suspending their disbelief. The vaunted skepticism of experienced journalists was in short supply when each of the stars signed on to a lucrative deal with a public relations outfit to act as host, on a make-believe news set, in what they say they were told were educational news breaks relating to matters of health — but which, as Melody Peterson reported in the May 7 *New York Times*, were in fact sophisticated infomercials promoting drug companies and their products. As one too-easily-duped employee at a public television station that regularly carries similar videos candidly told Peterson, "They offer them to us for free, so I don't go digging around for any other information." Other stations, however, have refused such gifts because of their promotional nature. (Cronkite and Brown have since bowed out of the deal; Safer is asking that the hundreds of his widely distributed tapes be taken off the air.)

**DART** to *International Living*, for cheapening the profession. In its latest come-on to footloose schnorrers, the monthly travel and life-style newsletter, put out by Agora Publishing, dangles a dazzling vision in which "for a limited time...before the doors close," you, along with only 1,999 others, can, for the specially discounted price of \$298, become an "Agora International Correspondent" with your very own Press Pass — that "valuable document" that could get you, like other members of "accredited" news organizations, to the destination of your dreams at a cost of "next to nothing." As just one enviable bargain among many in his eighteen-page e-mailed pitch, Agora's president, Bill Bonner, shamelessly cites his three-week trip around the Pacific — "all expenses paid!" — sponsored by tourism interests that "wanted good press to get more business." He also cites CJR, which reported on the "\$298 credentials" in 1999. "Even the prestigious *Columbia Journalism Review*," Bonner boasts, "felt compelled to discuss it (without knowing quite what to make of it)." Memo to Bonner: The prestigious *Columbia Journalism Review* knows exactly what to make of it: it's a truly tacky travesty of what real journalists, with real press passes, are all about.

Darts & Laurels is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's deputy executive editor. Nominations: gc15@columbia.edu, 212-854-1887.



## Unfinished Business

*As the Jayson Blair debate makes clear, we still need diversity programs*

Jayson Blair's flameout at *The New York Times* was the result of many things, not the least of which was Blair's inability to do his job honestly, whether because he was out of his depth or sick or both. By all accounts, Blair is brash and aggressive, a talented writer with a seemingly endless energy to pursue both stories and career connections. As such, he fit nicely into the star system of the former *Times* editor, Howell Raines.

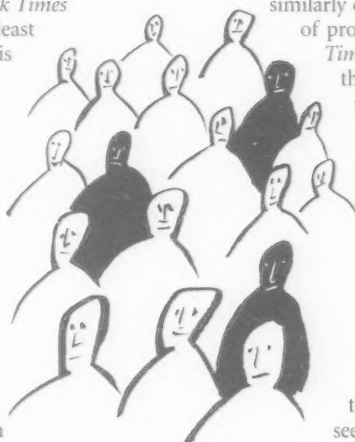
Blair is also black, and that played a role, too. The *Times's* commitment to diversifying its newsroom is well established (*The Wall Street Journal's* Holman Jenkins, Jr. called it a "nearly gothic hang-up"), and Raines admitted as much when he told his staff that, "as a white man from Alabama," he gave Blair "one chance too many," at least in part because he is black.

Yet in the polarized debate over diversity that has erupted in Blair's wake, the issue of race has often been confined to two extremes. One extreme holds that race had nothing to do with the Blair affair, and to even bring it up is to somehow imply that Blair plagiarized and fabricated *because* he is black (why wasn't race mentioned, this argument goes, when Stephen Glass, *The New Republic's* serial fabricator, was exposed in 1998?). The other extreme holds that race had *everything* to do with it, and that Blair is exhibit A in the case against all deliberate attempts to diversify the workplace.

Both arguments assume a color-blind society that does not exist. The former because it willfully ignores how Blair's race surely complicated his boss's attitude toward him; the latter because it inevitably leads to the shallow conclusion that with the snap of our fingers we can be free of the weight of a long racial history. Neither argument helps us move beyond the status quo, which is unacceptable. U.S. newsrooms are 12.5 percent minority (against a national population that is 31 percent minority), according to the American Society of Newspaper Editors' 2003 survey. Less than 10 percent of newsroom "supervisors" — the managerial class — are members of minority groups. Meanwhile, for complex reasons, the pool of young people of color choosing to enter journalism is actually shrinking, as Wanda S. Lloyd, who directs the Freedom Forum's Diversity Institute, pointed out in *CJR* last year. All this as the communities we cover grow steadily more diverse.

So in addition to the social argument for affirmative action, there is now, for the media especially, an economic argument for it.

Last month, the Supreme Court affirmed the use of race in college admissions, and we in the media must remain



similarly committed to diversity and to the kinds of programs that brought Jayson Blair to the *Times*. Such programs crack open worlds that might otherwise remain closed to so many people. Once inside, they can thrive and enrich the news report.

What gets lost in the polarized post-Blair debate is a candid discussion of the challenge of managing diversity within the newsroom. As David K. Shieler writes in his 1997 book *A Country of Strangers: Blacks and Whites in America*: "Although affirmative action brings people into the same room, it does not teach them how to deal with one another once they are there. Every workplace is a warren of unseen walls and barriers." All young reporters need nurturing. But young minority reporters often face a range of issues and emotions their white counterparts do not: the pressure, real or imagined, of white assumptions about their ability to do the job; pressure to try to represent an entire race or ethnicity. "When you have more in common, on the surface, with a rap star than you do with a newspaperman who's got thirty years in the profession," writes Joshunda Sanders, a twenty-five-year-old black reporter at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "there is a level of discomfort that is hard to describe."

Whether it is true, as some have argued, that in the post-Jayson Blair world all minority hires will be scrutinized and questioned more than ever, the fact that so many seem to believe it only makes managing diversity all the more challenging.

The other side of this balancing act is that it is a form of racism *not* to scrutinize and question, *not* to hold reporters hired through diversity programs to rigorous standards. Macarena Hernandez, the young reporter who briefly served with Blair on a diversity internship at the *Times*, and who later busted him when he plagiarized her story in the *San Antonio Express-News*, put it this way in an op-ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times*: "If *The New York Times* was sincerely committed to diversity, Blair's editors would have chopped off his fingers at the first sign of trouble instead of helping him polish his claws." Hernandez, by the way, reports that she received serious and thorough mentoring during her stint at the *Times*.

Someday, we hope, the idea of a diversity program will be seen as a quaint and unnecessary vestige because we will have become the color-blind society of Martin Luther King's famous dream. We're not there yet. Diversity programs are a way to move in that direction, and thus are worth the complicated trip.



## THE INQUIRER: A NEW BOSS, A TOUGH JOB

Lundy's sudden exit leaves a newsroom guessing

**G**ene Roberts was the editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* for eighteen years; Max King for eight; Robert Rosenthal lasted three. Walker Lundy? One and a half. If the paper's new editor hopes to reverse this unhappy trend, she will have to study some of the tensions underneath it.

Lundy, sixty, quit suddenly in early May, ending a thirty-year career with Knight Ridder. He said he wanted to "live on a lake and drive a boat fast," read "a million books," and "write something more spellbinding than memos." In meetings with the staff, Lundy said he and his wife had visited a Philadelphia financial planner who told them they were secure enough financially to retire. The *Inquirer* editorship, he said, was the best job in journalism if you have to work, but if you don't have to, why do it?

Few staff members believed him. A suburban reporter, Diane Mastrull, asked why he did not consult a financial planner before leaving St. Paul, where he had been editor of the *Pioneer Press* for eleven years. "It seemed like you would consult your financial planner before you make a big move," Mastrull says. "A lot of people were unsatisfied with the answer. It just didn't ring true." Others point out that just a year before he quit, Lundy had purchased a 3,400-square-foot house for \$678,000 on the Philadelphia Main Line; and that, more importantly, he had come to the paper with big hopes and big dreams of finding the right strategy for its suburban growth, something his predecessors had failed to do. "It was extremely shocking to many of us working in the



OUT: WALKER LUNDY

suburbs that he would choose to retire as the plan was gaining momentum," Mastrull says.

Lundy declined to talk to CJR. His assistant, Carol Damiano, says he has "no more to say than what's in the statement." Such silence is not unusual among departing newspaper and magazine executives, notes Ben Bagdikian, former dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California, Berkeley. Bagdikian, who has studied executive compensation, says top executives are sometimes asked to sign agreements forbidding negative public comment after they leave, at the price of losing benefits. "That's why they all say they want to spend more time with their families," Bagdikian says. "Lundy couldn't take it any more. That's my guess."

That was the guess of a number of staff members as well — that perhaps Lundy was unable to stomach constant financial pressure from Knight Ridder, or that he had grown tired of the battle. By most accounts, Lundy did not have particularly smooth sailing at the *Inquirer*, and news-



IN: AMANDA BENNETT

room reviews of his performance are mixed. But he did shake the place up. He slashed some budgets and reduced the number of editors with "managing editor" in their title from eleven to five. He merged the foreign and national desks, and, according to some employees, devalued government, national, and foreign stories. He had a strategy that favored more coverage in suburbs like Cherry Hill and Conshohocken, and expanded the number of zoned editions from three to five. He forced some seventy editorial employees to change jobs, a move that did not endear him to those who felt their careers were being uprooted. He pushed for livelier stories, and for local news. And he hired forty new employees, a number that many in the newsroom believe was too high for Knight Ridder and that got him in trouble. He made some mistakes, including a protracted search for a managing editor and an unnecessary fight with The Newspaper Guild. Nonetheless, a number of reporters thought the suburban strategy was a sound one. "My bottom line is that he made this paper better in the eighteen months he has been here,"

says the New Jersey editor, Julie Busby. The *Inquirer's* publisher, Robert Hall, says Lundy's suburban road map was "a clear vision — one people are committed to, and one I do not see changing."

But in the end, says Arlene Morgan, a former assistant managing editor, now an assistant dean at Columbia's journalism school, Lundy walked into a dysfunctional newspaper. "I don't think he understood the division and arguments between the business side and the newsroom. He didn't understand the tensions." In April, just before he quit, Lundy announced the closing of the 103-year-old Sunday magazine, a high-cost, low-revenue enterprise that made an easy fiscal target. That did not seem to be his idea and he wasn't happy about it. He was overheard saying that killing the magazine was like eating the paper's "seed corn," according to Newspaper Guild officials who rode with him on an elevator on the way to the staff meeting where he closed the magazine. It may have been one cut too many.

The staff seems pleased with Hall's choice as new editor, Amanda Bennett, who worked as a reporter and editor at *The Wall Street Journal* for twenty-three years, then as managing editor for enterprise reporting at *The Oregonian* in Portland, and finally, editor of the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, Knight Ridder's Kentucky daily, for twenty-one months. Whatever direction she takes in Philadelphia, she will find a staff yearning for leadership, and for an editor who is in it for the long haul.

— Trudy Lieberman  
Lieberman is a contributing editor to CJR.

## 'BLOGRAISING' BEGINS

But will readers pay up?

**D**avid Appell's story proposal sounded promising: an investigation of the sugar industry involving "big politics, big science, and big money." Appell, a free-lance science journalist, was not pitching to the editor of *Nature*, *Scientific American*, or *Audubon*, some of his typical targets. This time, it was the one hundred or so daily readers of his Weblog, Quark Soup, whose interest he was seeking to pique.

"If I can raise \$200 in contributions from my readers," Appell wrote on his blog on May 14, "I'll report the story here first." It wasn't that magazine editors had rejected Appell's pitch — he hadn't tried them. He simply wanted to offer the story to his blog audience "for the idea of it all," and he was willing to do it for a pittance. Along with a five-sentence story tease, Appell linked to his résumé and past work. He invited potential donors to click the Amazon Honor System button on his site (Amazon's system, like PayPal, processes online payments). The suggested contribution was \$5. It was, he wrote, "an experiment in independent journalism." He expected little.

Within twenty-four hours, he had \$370, nearly twice his modest goal. Nine days later, his tally was \$425. An anonymous supporter chipped in \$250. A natural-food store employee gave \$20. Some well-established bloggers — including Glenn Reynolds (aka instapundit) and Kevin Drum (aka Calpundit) — linked to Appell's site, sparking a discussion across multiple blogs about the viability of what was variously referred to as "journalism on demand," "pay-per-view journalism," and "microjournalism."

Microjournalism's first success story, Christopher Allbritton — a blogger and former reporter for the AP and New York's *Daily News* — also linked to Appell's site. Allbritton had raised nearly \$13,000 in seven months on his own blog, Back in Iraq 2.0, to fund an independent reporting trip to Iraq. His efforts generated a fair amount of

press attention. During the fund-raising process, Allbritton says, the media lumped him together with "cyberbeggars" like Karyn Bosnak, who asked for and received more than \$13,000 in Web donations to help pay off her credit card debt. But once Allbritton filed his stories from Iraq in April, he says, he went from e-panhandler to "the Web's first independent war correspondent." It was the success of Back in Iraq, Appell says, that inspired him to "get into the mix."

Clive Thompson, a journalist, blogger, and Knight Science Journalism Fellow at MIT, is enthusiastic about the prospects of what he calls "blograising" for specific stories because on a blog "you're talking directly to people who are interested in what you do, and in fund-raising, that is golden." While Thompson says he is likely to try blograising himself, neither he, Appell, nor Allbritton can foresee a day when they would be able to live on blog-funded journalism alone.

One blogger who perhaps could live on blograising is Andrew Sullivan, a former editor of *The New Republic*, who reportedly pulled in \$79,020 in donations during a one-week pledge drive last December to fund his feisty, right-leaning Weblog opinions. But if opinion is, as Allbritton says, the "lingua franca" of blogs, is there a blog market for straightforward, independent reporting and investigative pieces as well? Whether or how blog-reader-supported journalism takes hold, it has certainly struck a chord among bloggers, even among nonjournalists. Appell's experiment prompted Kevin Drum, a retired technology marketing executive, to fantasize on his blog about an eBay for reporters, where they could "post story ideas and get bids from potential readers (or editors who just wanted to buy the story outright)."

Four weeks after Appell pitched his sugar story, there was still no sign of a finished product on Quark Soup. "It's coming," Appell wrote on June 3, adding that "this type of forum" (no editor, no hard deadline) gives him the freedom to report and write the story thoroughly, if not quickly. As on most blogs, Appell's audience will likely play editor and fact-checker once his story is posted.

— Liz Cox

Cox is an assistant editor at CJR.

## LANGUAGE CORNER

### A RULE TO IGNORE

**A** lot of attention has been devoted to a grammar argument, of all things, between a high school journalism teacher and the College Board. The teacher won.

He had objected to this part of a sentence on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test:

"Toni Morrison's genius enables her . . ."

The teacher insisted — for three months — that a possessive noun (Tony Morrison's) functions as an adjective and can't lead logically to a pronoun (her). In late May, the College Board capitulated, as in fairness it had to. Such a rule did show up in a few grammar books, so students who applied it couldn't be penalized.

The triumphant — and clearly dedicated — teacher was roundly cheered. Yet the rule that enticed him years ago defies common sense. Must "Jane's word is her bond" become "Jane's word is Jane's bond"? No. Possessives with their very own pronouns have been ubiquitous in good English writing forever.

On June 1, the Stanford linguist Geoffrey Nunberg, writing in

the Week in Review section of *The New York Times*, provided legal support. Possessives like "Toni Morrison's," he said, should be thought of not as adjectives but as "determiner phrases," which can be tied to pronouns. Nice to know.

Earlier, one commentator savaged the board, saying it "wrote an error" into the PSAT. His solution: Say "The genius of Toni Morrison . . .," making the name work as a noun, leading legally to "her." All English possessives can be formed with "of," though, and not always happily. Anybody like "The word of Jane is her bond"? Or try tapping to the rhythm of "The body of John Brown lies a-mouldering in the grave, but his soul goes marching on."

The apostrophe is so handy. French-speakers have to make do with "la plume de ma tante," but English-speakers can say "my aunt's pen." And can certainly add, "is mightier than her sword."

— Evan Jenkins

A lot more about writing is in Language Corner at CJR's Web site, [www.cjr.org](http://www.cjr.org).

## Who

fought for a quality education for their children?

## Who

went to jail in order to ride the public buses?

## Who

changed the law to gain access to the vote?

## Who

has created more change in America than any other group in the last 2 decades?

People with disabilities - 54 million of us. Changing the face of America.



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## THE PRO BONO PLAGIARIST

**F**rom 1994 to 2002, Larry Reeves had nearly 150 bylined stories in *The Tri-State Defender*, Memphis's oldest African-American newspaper. Many of those stories, as it turns out, occurred in distant cities and were first published in other newspapers. Reeves got around.

Or maybe not. Virginia L. Porter, once the *Defender's* managing editor, is among a group of the paper's former employees who say that Larry Reeves was an alias created by Tom Picou, the CEO of Sengstacke Enterprises, Inc., a chain of primarily black newspapers including the *Defender*. "I know for a fact Tom is Larry Reeves," she says. Ditto, Porter says, for Reginold Bundy, a columnist whose work was often on the front page, yet whom she and others never met.

Tony Jones, a former *Defender* reporter, says the Picou-Reeves-Bundy connection was common knowledge in the newsroom. Jones says that Picou regularly called from Chicago to ask about various Memphis locations. That information then found its way into Reeves's stories, Jones says. Reached in his Chicago office, Picou denied that he was Reeves or Bundy.

The Reeves-Bundy contretemps began in April when a reporter from the *East Bay Express*, an Oakland, California-area weekly, stumbled across a November 13 *Defender* piece by Larry Reeves that was an almost verbatim copy of a local story the *Express* had run a week earlier, with only the names and locations changed. The *Express* wrote about the deception, and the weekly *Memphis Flyer* began investigating Reeves's and Bundy's work.

The *Defender's* current editor and publisher, Marzie Thomas, admitted that Reeves and Bundy plagiarized, but said the bylines were not Picou aliases. "It's ludicrous to think Mr. Picou was behind this," says Thomas, who became the *Defender's* editor in 2003 after managing the paper's advertising since 1991. She did not, however, know anything about the mystery journalists.

For his part, Picou says he has "no idea who Larry Reeves is or where he is." But he did venture this description of Reeves for a *Flyer* reporter: "A white guy probably about eighty years old" who did all his *Defender* work pro bono. Why would an eighty-year-old white guy write for free about black culture and crime? the *Flyer* asked. "Writers are a dime a dozen," Picou says. At the *Defender*, maybe even cheaper than that.

— Aaron Moore

Moore, a Philadelphia-based free-lancer, compiles the *Who Owns What* feature on CJR's Web site.

## TECH CORNER

[www.searchsystems.net](http://www.searchsystems.net)

**T**he best site for finding public records is SearchSystems.net, with more than 15,200 searchable public-record databases, including records of unclaimed property, sex offenders, and legislative documents, to name a few. You can do nationwide or state-by-state searches, or visit the growing international section.

Most searches are free, and in each case, the site links out to the relevant government agency or private company that tracks the information. The service is U.S.-centric but is adding databases from other countries.

— Sree Sreenivasan

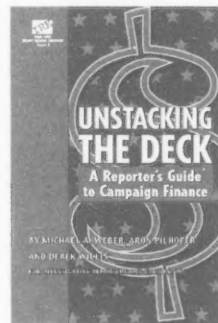
Sreenivasan ([sree@sree.net](mailto:sree@sree.net)), who teaches new media at Columbia, offers his tips for journalists at [SreeTips.com](http://SreeTips.com)

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# 4

## NATIONAL MAGAZINE AWARDS

### THE NEW YORKER



#### REPORTING

David Remnick, editor

*In the Party of God*, a two-part article by Jeffrey Goldberg.

#### FICTION

David Remnick, editor

*Baader-Meinhof*, by Don DeLillo; *The Thing in the Forest*, by A. S. Byatt; *Jolene: A Life*, by E. L. Doctorow.

### Condé Nast Traveler



#### PHOTOGRAPHY

Thomas J. Wallace, editor-in-chief

Robert Best, design director; Kathleen Klech, photography director, for September, October, November issues.

### VANITY FAIR



#### REVIEWS AND CRITICISM

Graydon Carter, editor

*Terror on the Dotted Line*; *U.S. Confidential*; *The Penance of Pirates*, by James Wolcott, for three articles.

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Monday May 12, 2003  
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# The Times

## After the Storm

*Jayson Blair, Howell Raines, and the Rest of Us*

*As the scandal fades, questions persist: Among them, What's the counterweight to an editor's power? What really happens when sources are misrepresented? How do we manage diversity now?*

### FLOODING THE ZONE

BY PAUL D. COLFORD

**T**he fall of Howell Raines was riveting to cover but hard to watch. And with a little distance, some aspects of the story become clearer. Among them is the realization that Jayson Blair was just a supporting player.

Exactly five weeks passed between the resignations of Blair and Raines, but the discovery of the reporter's deceptions wasn't the first act in the drama. In retrospect, it was the spiking of two sports columns six months earlier that marked the beginning of the end for Raines and managing editor Gerald Boyd. Yes, those columns — by Harvey Araton and Dave Anderson, both of whom differed with *Times* editorials on the Masters Tournament at the men-only Augusta National Golf Club — eventually did run in amended form. But outrage within *The New York Times* ran so high, and was expressed to me so freely by reporters and editors at the paper, that I should have recognized the stirrings of a major revolt.

At first, in fact, I didn't even believe the story. Since joining the *New York Daily News* in the summer of 2000 as a media reporter, I'd listened to many laments about Raines's hard-handed, my-way management style. But when a source

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### FIXING THE SYSTEM

BY EVAN JENKINS

**L**inda Greenhouse got it right, I thought. In an interview in May about the Jayson Blair disaster that was quoted in *The Wall Street Journal* on June 6, the day after Howell Raines resigned as executive editor of *The New York Times*, she observed:

"There is an endemic cultural issue at the *Times* that is not a Howell creation, although it plays into his vulnerabilities as a manager, which is a top-down hierarchical structure. And it's a culture where speaking truth to power has never been particularly welcomed."

Greenhouse, who won a 1998 Pulitzer Prize for her Supreme Court coverage, started at the *Times* as a clerk in 1968, so she has seen of lot of its comings and goings and ups and downs. She was describing a phenomenon that seemed increasingly true to me, too, in my quarter-century on West Forty-third Street. Making it easier to speak truth to power is surely something the *Times* leadership must be thinking about.

The top of the structure when I arrived at the *Times* as a foreign-desk copy editor in 1966 consisted, at least in the masthead hierarchy, of Turner Catledge, executive editor, and Clifton Daniel, managing editor. They were largely hands-off managers. So were some of the department heads, with the

notable exception of A.M. Rosenthal, whose Pulitzer-capped career as a correspondent had recently brought him back to New York and the metropolitan editor's job.

But in 1966 the editing process — and therefore much of the day-to-day responsibility for *New York Times* journalism — was still dominated by Theodore M. Bernstein, an assistant managing editor and an authority on the language, and his top assistant, Lewis Jordan.

Along with three other middle-aged career editors they were the news desk, informally the "bullpen." Organizationally an arm of the executive editor's office, the bullpen had no staff of its own, no departmental turf to protect, and no constituency but the reader. Looking back, I marvel at its autonomy. It was a guardian of *Times* standards — not only for the language, but for greater virtues like fairness and accuracy. If the culture of responsible journalism had an institutional center at the *Times*, it was the bullpen. Other papers, later, had ombudsmen to take their publications to task after the fact. The bullpen's work at its best was preemptive integrity.

And the *Times* in 1966 was an editor's paper. Great power flowed from Bernstein's bullpen to the career editors, "working editors" as I've always thought of them. They were the departmental assistants — and at the foundation, copy editors — who actually put ballpoint pen to reporters' copy or had built their careers on that foundation. Editors ruled.

The upside was that the system did maintain rigorous standards, but even some editors complained that everything seemed to be poured into the same flat mold. Bad writing, of which there was a surprising amount, was made presentable, but really good, original stuff might or might not survive. (Gordon Havens, a copy editor whose longevity at the paper in 1966 matched Bernstein's forty-one years, swore some editor had once encountered "George Washington" in copy and added "the country's first president.")

Worse than silly gaffes — fatally worse — was the arrogant secrecy of much of the editing. Reporters, even the metro people working in the same room, commonly had no idea what editors were doing to their copy until they saw it in the paper the next day. Collegial consultation was far from the norm.

After 1969, when Abe Rosenthal took charge of the newsroom — still almost lily-white and almost all male — change of all kinds came rapidly. Aided by his ever-steadying top deputy, Seymour Topping, and his imaginative, hyper-energetic No. 3, Arthur Gelb, Rosenthal presided over a transformation in the '70s. New sections were added to attract new readers, and saved the paper financially. The staff grew apace, and a lot of old hands yielded to younger people who were comfortable (in varying degrees) with the Rosenthal program. (One of those was a brainy, cocksure young editor named Allan M. Siegal, who in mid-decade showed the *Times* the way from typewriters and pens to computers.) Women showed up in the newsroom in impressive numbers in those years, and gradually blacks and Hispanics were better represented. Both the women and the minorities sued the paper in the '70s and won settlements promising a better shake. Lawsuits aside, an awakened management's commitment to affirmative action

THE NEW YORK TIMES



PAIRED: The reporter, Jayson Blair (inset), and the editor, Howell Raines

always seemed to me genuine, though uneven.

A lot of people have used the word "genius" to describe Rosenthal, and maybe it's the right word. *The New York Times* became a much more interesting, varied, readable paper in his era. But the power he wielded was not always easy to speak the truth to, and "top-down" leadership became the *Times's* style. Meanwhile, a powerful premium attached to capital-W Writing. The pendulum was swinging from editor's paper to reporter's and writer's paper.

In 1974, after a happy but brief tour as a reporter, I returned to editing as an assistant on the national desk. The Nixon presidency was disintegrating; it was a hell of a time to be editing national news. I headed national's night "backfield," charged with pre-editing stories before they went to the copy desk. One afternoon in that tense time, a copy kid dropped a piece of paper on my desk. A duplicate went to Lew Jordan, news editor and head of the bullpen since Bernstein's semi-retirement a few years before. The copy was the first page of the end-stage-Watergate story that would lead the paper the next day.

Almost instantly, it seemed, Jordan was at my desk. The lead of the story read well, he said, but was loaded against Nixon and would have to be redone. We talked about some possible rephrasing.

I called the desk editor in Washington to give him the bad news. About five minutes later he called back to say that if we insisted on the changes, the reporter — one of our best in every way, including his sense of fairness — wanted his byline removed. I told Jordan, who sighed briefly but said, "All right, take it off."

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## FLOODING THE ZONE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

phoned me back after an exchange on another *Times* story to say, "By the way, I heard a column by Harvey Araton was spiked," I scribbled a note and laid it at the side of my desk. Something to do with editorials. But, nah, couldn't be; a *Times* editor killing a column in the name of ideological alignment?

I acted on the supposed tip only hours later, almost sheepishly, running it by another source who might know a thing or two. This one paused — it was one of those *holy shit* moments — before telling me I had only one-half of the story. I kept the news to myself until after I reached Anderson at home in New Jersey. "That's right, my column didn't run," the veteran sports-

writer told me, without hesitation and on the record, as if he had been waiting for the call. "It was decided by the editors that we should not argue with the editorial page." *TIMES EDITORS KILL 2 COLUMNS IN AUGUSTA RIFT* was the thirty-six-point head in the *News* on December 4. Speaking also for Raines, who was out of the country, Boyd tried to explain why the columns had been pulled: "Intramural quarreling of that kind is unseemly and self-absorbed." It did not go over well. For days afterward, staffers complained that they didn't know what had happened, and they found the official explanation flawed and arrogant.

This was the first prolonged rumbling about the *Times's* newsroom management. It would grow to a rebellious roar when the details of Blair's breathtaking deceit and the conflicted oversight of top editors became known. Tracking the impact of staff unrest and bungled supervision of Blair on the heart, soul, and future of the *Times* would consume my time and en-

## FIXING THE SYSTEM

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

That episode has long seemed to me symbolic — of the happy midpoint of the *Times* pendulum's swing from editor's to reporter/writer's paper, and of a proper balance between career-editor domination and masthead-down leadership. Jordan the "working editor" could make the decision he did about the principal story of the day without consulting the top brass, and I could carry it out without consulting my own higher authority (though I should have). What neither Jordan nor I could have done was keep the reporter in the dark, as we might have a decade earlier. Abe Rosenthal and the people who reported to him would not allow it. And of course they were right.

But it's also true, I'm morally certain, that within a couple of years no editor below the masthead level — not the news editor, not the national editor, in whose jurisdiction the story was handled — could have made the decision on his own that Jordan made that day. The pendulum would swing too far for that.

Jordan retired a couple of years later, and after a brief interim Al Siegal became news editor and my boss; I had been appointed to the news desk in 1975. It seemed clear to me that under Rosenthal the news editor — and certainly his small cadre of assistants — were expected to avoid involvement in important issues in the day's report. Power was centered higher up.

Siegal became an assistant managing editor — a title Rosenthal never bestowed on Lew Jordan — almost the minute Max Frankel succeeded to the executive editor's job in 1986. Another career editor was appointed news editor, with me as deputy. Frankel, though of the writerly school himself, also found merit in working editors. And he was a much more approachable and much less tempestuous man than Rosenthal.

But Frankel was also more efficient as an administrator, and nothing was too minute for his attention. Top-down control, which he said he opposed in principle, became even tighter. Working editors still referred to the masthead folks as "the grownups." They were mocking themselves for their own ineffectuality, and they were mocking the system that imposed it.

I left the *Times* in 1991, when Frankel was still editor. Al Siegal was my boss to the end, and I've never had a more able one, or

a tougher. He remains a friend. He was named in May to head a post-Blair committee that is reexamining all things *Timesian*, and I wished him well. We have not discussed the substance of his new assignment. I have been thinking about his task, though, and about some of the questions that the *Times* might well be asking itself now.

To me the Blair episode is a freak of nature, enormously embarrassing and even damaging to the *Times* and journalism at large but an aberration, not a sign of basic institutional weakness. Yet aberrations do occur. I find myself asking whether the editor's paper of Bernstein and Jordan would have prevented the Blair mess. It's conceivable that with his error rate and with the power they wielded they'd have raised enough hell to get him fired — or far out of harm's way — before anyone knew he was a thoroughgoing, disturbed con artist. Maybe even before he became one. Blair clearly was cut some slack before his larcenous nature was known — but not after, as far as I can tell — because he was black. It would be a huge mistake to forget that black, white, or green, he was also cut some slack because he could write.

Beyond aberrations of the Blair sort are journalistic excesses with far greater consequences for the body politic. Think Wen Ho Lee. Think Travelgate and Filegate and, for my money, think Whitewater itself, and all the frenzied energy the American press expended on them. Those kinds of excesses, too, also happen when truth can't speak forcefully enough to power.

From all I've read, and heard from *Times* friends, such speaking was harder than ever there under Howell Raines. But I hope the Siegal committee and the publisher and the next editor will conclude that the problem is not solely a function of personality, and that the structure of the newsroom has put too much power at the top. And that it may be time to swing back the pendulum, creating some entity that has no turf to protect beyond standards and credibility.

It can't be the working-editor autocracy of the past, and I can't offer a detailed prescription. But some such systemic change — some sort of editor-reporter collegium? — should be a serious consideration. An ombudsman is nice for addressing problems after they occur; an agency for preemptive integrity is better. ■

*Evan Jenkins, a consulting editor for CJR, worked at The New York Times from 1966 to 1991.*



ergy like no other story in twenty-five years as a newspaperman.

Reporting on the news media summons almost self-conscious care and caution, because the primary audience for the stories includes the most discerning readers, fellow journalists who may be studying the copy with an insider's sense of the business and the circumstances and the players involved. Yet, as in any tense story, the drama at the *Times* also offered sources with a range of motivations — from the anonymous callers who sounded as if they wanted to settle old scores to the high-minded professionals who agreed to share what they knew while wrestling with grave concerns about how the *Times* might be altered by the crisis.

I wrote my stories carefully to conceal the fingerprints of sources, most of whom spoke only on background or not for attribution. They knew things and heard other things, but were generally careful to distinguish between the two. No two sources were alike; some I would not recognize on the street and probably never will. My confidence stemmed from the faith I had in them and the belief that they primarily wanted to help tell a story from the inside that the *Times* itself was covering only intermittently. None of them saw Raines's reign ending anytime soon, and only a few expressed any personal disregard for him or Boyd. Amid the mordant humor that rolls through the ranks of the news business, and despite the new wave of cynicism about the media that rose in the *Times* tempest, I identified an admirable virtue in these sources that I characterized as "corporate patriotism." The *Times* was blessed to have these people. They shared an anguish over insults to a paper they were fiercely proud to work for, and were now horrified to find being ridiculed, not only by the usual political detractors, but by Jon Stewart and David Letterman. They were troubled that blunders in management, a seeming lack of accountability on high, were now red meat for outspoken ideologues of all stripes, who would delight in the paper's misfortunes.

Still, one of the surprises in covering a story about a great journalistic institution was the wealth of bad information floating around. After the *Times* published its famous four-page chronicle of Blair's troubled history, on May 11, inviting readers to point out further discrepancies in any of his stories, I kept hearing a litany of familiar names who supposedly were "under investigation," like Blair. These potentially ruinous allegations — hearsay, really — circulated so widely that it's worth trumpeting even at this late date that Rick Bragg was the only other reporter to fall. Bragg resigned five days after the *Times* revealed that a free-lancer had done much of the reporting and interviewing for one of Bragg's stories last year, and should have shared the byline. Various staff members also told me of major investigations into the *Times* that were about to pop in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Washington Post*, and other news outlets — but never did. At one hot moment in May, word spread that the *Newsweek* bloodhound Michael Isikoff had sniffed out a big scoop. He wasn't even on the story. At another point, Bill Kovach, Raines's former boss in the Washington bureau, was returning to the *Times*, seemingly in a peace-making role as the paper's first ombudsman. Also untrue.

If I had five bucks for each groundless piece of information, I could treat a party of four to dinner at Lutèce. It seems to me



that, as more reporters jumped on the story and peppered the *Times's* New York and Washington newsrooms with calls, some of the people who received those calls would then describe to colleagues the nature of the queries. They probably did so with melodramatic flourish, causing fear and speculation to run wild. On some days, I half-expected to be told that Raines had been on the grassy knoll in Dallas. But some leads that seemed far-fetched had to be checked. For example, I was asked by an editor to act on a tip that the publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., was about to replace Raines with Thomas Friedman, the paper's influential foreign-affairs columnist. Reached quickly in Washington, Friedman shot the tip dead,

expressed support for Raines, and said he thought the editor was doing a great job. He then told the *Times* spokeswoman Catherine Mathis of the query he had just received from the *Daily News*, prompting her to ask me with concern if a Friedman candidacy would be given credence in the next day's *News*. Not at all, I assured her. (Both the *Times* and those who cover the *Times*, by the way, were lucky to have Mathis in the p.r. slot and not a spin doctor who might have complicated matters by barring the door against hard questions. Mathis was informed in her answers to questions. And more important, she spoke with authority for the *Times*, Raines, and Sulzberger.)

The days ran long, mainly because I couldn't start writing most stories until 5 or 5:30. I got home at 9:30 P.M., sometimes later, and often found *Times*-related phone messages with the afternoon mail. Bragg's suspension for misusing the stringer broke on May 23, a day I was supposed to take off to attend a brother's wedding at the Jersey shore. I filed a story from home, was back on the phone in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Garden State Parkway, discussed a new lead with my editor after reaching my hotel room, and later drew a disbelieving stare from my brother when I stepped away to take one more call from the desk as he was just about to walk down the aisle. On the one hand, focused totally on a sprawl of a story, one that tantalized many of my *News* colleagues and drew them to my desk throughout the day to seek updates and offer tips of their own, I couldn't see beyond the next deadline. "Real life" seemed a dim memory. At the same time, I was keenly aware that the biggest media story in years, judging from the number of links packed into Romenesko, meant little to most people outside our ink-stained tribe. My father-in-law, for example, a retired plumbing contractor from Bayonne, New Jersey, has read the *News* every day since he left the Navy in World War II. But he's never commented on a media story of mine, let alone the recent string of *Times* pieces that took over my life for much of the spring. When I stepped off the train each night in my old New Jersey suburb, fifteen miles from midtown Manhattan, I was surrounded by neighbors who do not work in the media and show little interest in their psychodramas. Of far greater interest was last year's widely reported warfare between publisher Gruner+Jahr USA and Rosie O'Donnell, over control of *Rosie* magazine. For someone who covers the media, that's a valuable reality check. ■

Paul D. Colford writes the twice-weekly "Hot Copy" column and other media stories for the New York Daily News.



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## DIVERSITY: THE OPERATING MANUAL

BY LINDA WALLACE

Jayson Blair may have used his color as a shield against the radar at *The New York Times*. But blaming diversity when personnel problems go terribly awry, as they did in this instance, is like blaming expensive and delicate machinery for malfunctioning when the workers don't have operating manuals.

The drive for diversity is a business imperative. According to the U.S. government's Minority Business Development Agency's report, "The Emerging Minority Marketplace," America's multiethnic purchasing power may reach \$4.3 trillion by 2045, up from \$1.3 trillion in 2000. Even if newspapers don't really want to reach those multiethnic customers, their large corporate advertisers will insist on it.

To increase circulation in the emerging markets, mainstream newspapers first have to create a product ethnic readers find credible. Each day's news report is like a giant puzzle. Each new cultural perspective included from special populations — youth, women, and ethnic or racial groups — adds clarity and provides insight. When newspapers present only the majority view, as many now do, they are giving their readers only a piece of the puzzle.

So there is no turning back. That means we must learn how to manage diversity, to operate the machinery in an even-handed way. And that, in turn, means dealing straightforwardly with the people inside newsrooms who tend to derail diversity programs and ruin the programs' reputation. I have met such people in every newsroom I have worked in, and they tend to hold back progress. Who are they?

**THE PARENTS:** The editors who believe that some journalists should be held to lower standards because race or ethnicity puts them at a disadvantage. This paternalistic practice undermines the professional development of journalists of all colors. I have known editors who overlooked grammatical errors by blacks (because they came from inferior schools) and reporting deficiencies by whites who lacked the cultural skills or courage to report from poor, multiethnic neighbor-

hoods. Jayson Blair seems to have met his share of "parents" at the *Times*.

**THE VICTIMS:** The "I didn't get that job because I'm the wrong color" attitude, which excuses reporters and editors of all colors from examining their own faults and weaknesses.

**THE BULLIES:** Journalists who gain power in their newsrooms by engaging in disruptive behavior or bullying of their colleagues. Editors often are afraid to talk to them, provide feedback, or to fire them. Within this group you will find "the angry black man," "the angry white man," and the "plotters," who smile in your face but look for ways behind your back to sabotage the newspaper.

**THE COLORBLIND:** Journalists who feel that their cultural identities, experiences, values, and beliefs never affect the way they report or edit stories. Since they are colorblind in their own minds, they tend to believe that all other views and people are biased. They seek conformity, not diversity.

**THE SUPERIORS:** This is a variation of the Colorblind, except that the Superiors feel that only people who think like them, act like them, and talk like them can perform well. They, too, value conformity, but want others to convert to their world view. They do not believe that two people can look at the same situation, draw different conclusions, and both be right.

On the other side of the ledger, managing diversity well means seeking ways to reward reporters and editors who achieve cultural competency, meaning they understand how cultures differ and can report and edit across cultural lines. That certainly doesn't require lower journalistic standards. It requires new skills and global literacy, and it requires us to learn to identify and manage the biases we bring into the newsroom each day. By working on ourselves we can move our industry forward. ■

*Linda Wallace, a former national reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer, is author of The Cultural Coach, an advice column on diversity published in The Houston Chronicle and the Greensboro News & Record.*

# BLAIR'S VICTIMS: THAT HELPLESS FEELING

BY ADEEL HASSAN

Some had fairly minor complaints. Others found facts wrong, entire scenes concocted, and quotes fabricated. But the victims of Jayson Blair's transgressions whom *CJR* interviewed did share something: a feeling of helplessness. They either didn't bother contacting *The New York Times* about the errors, or gave up after their phone calls and e-mails went unanswered or after the problems went unaddressed. Their reactions to Blair's journalistic sins — and the reasons for those reactions — vary widely. But none of them should make *The New York Times* or the rest of us feel good about people's expectations of journalism these days. Here is a sampling of those sources and their reactions; all but one are from the stories the *Times* corrected in its Jayson Blair opus May 11.

■ Roger Groot, a law professor at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, whom Blair profiled on January 2, 2003, says the piece included a physical description and a Lexington, Virginia, dateline, although all of his interviews were by phone. Blair wrote of the "balding professor who looks like a lawyer from central casting." Groot says he is not balding. "I wasn't misquoted, but even if he had misquoted me, I probably wouldn't have called the *Times*," Groot said. "This happens all the time, doesn't it? It's the rule, not the exception." Groot, a well-known death-penalty opponent who recently joined the legal defense team of John Lee Malvo (the younger of the two men charged in the Washington sniper case) and is mentioned in the press frequently, says he is often misquoted.

■ But Groot at least talked to the reporter. Robert J. Salemo, the chief financial officer of the American Craft Museum in Manhattan (now the Museum of Arts and Design), was horrified to read that his museum was "already in serious financial trouble before September 11" in the October 20, 2001, edition of the *Times*. Since Salemo never talked to Blair, the museum's public relations officer immediately protested to the metro editor and a correction was made. The correction, which read: "... while lower-level staff members spoke of financial troubles that existed before September 11, the director, Holly Hotchner, says the museum's finances are strong," still left Salemo unsatisfied. He suspects that Blair got his information from a *Times* employee who was the husband of a museum staff member he had just fired. Salemo also notes that the full financial records of the museum are on the Internet at GuideStar.com. They show that the museum was not in financial trouble before September 11. Salemo felt burned by both the story and the correction and didn't

===== Original Message From Jayson Blair <jablai@nytimes.com> =====

>Laing,  
>  
>Sorry for the delay in responding to your inquiries. The editor who handled  
>the story did not get back to me before I left for the Thanksgiving  
>holidays and I am only returning to the office now. In the end, we  
>ultimately cannot discuss the names of officials who are granted anonymity  
>in any of our stories. I would appreciate it, however, if you could send me  
>a list of the items that you thought were inaccurate.  
>  
>Best,  
>Jayson

**I SAID, 'NO ONE  
HERE TALKED  
TO YOU. WHO DID  
YOU TALK TO?'  
BLAIR WAS  
VERY POLITE...**

pursue his concerns further. "Jayson Blair took the pen, which is mightier than the sword, and drove it through people's hearts," he says. Later, when a *Times* reporter called Salemo in preparation for the long corrective article about Blair, "he asked me what I told Blair when he called. I said 'He didn't call me.' The reporter was shocked. I might have been one of the earlier calls" on the reporter's list.

■ For Pete Mahoney, associate athletic director at Kent State University, the shock came on Monday, November 25, 2002, when his boss told him about a *Times* sports story from Saturday, November 23, about Division I football programs bending rules to meet the NCAA minimum-attendance requirement. Mahoney was quoted as saying he, too, would bend rules: "We are going to try it until someone tells us to stop." But Jayson

Blair, he says, had only left a voice message for Mahoney the day before the story was published. They never spoke. "I was mad as hell because it made me look bad in front of my boss and the administration," Mahoney says. "If I had spoken to him, and my words were taken out of context, then I could have lived with that. But the freaking guy is a freaking liar." Mahoney says he didn't pursue the matter with the *Times* because "they hold the pen and have the financial resources." His boss, Athletic Director Laing Kennedy, however, did call Blair. "I asked him how a responsible newspaper could put out a story like that," Kennedy recalls. "I said, 'No one here has talked to you; who did you talk to? There are many problems in your story.' Blair was very polite. He said, 'I cannot divulge my sources.'" Kennedy pressed on and got an e-mail from Blair (see above), asking him to detail his complaints, which he did. But Kennedy never heard back. Kennedy then e-mailed William Brink, who was deputy sports editor at the time. But Kennedy sent it to the wrong address and never heard back. Kennedy gave up. Kennedy points out that the *Times* article was brought to his attention by the president of his college, Carol Cartwright, who chairs the NCAA executive committee. After Cartwright read the story, she left

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## DELUSIONS OF ACCURACY

BY ARIEL HART

**J**ournalists need to get more comfortable with mistakes. We might as well; there are probably a few in most of our stories. And it's the best way to fight them.

Recently, on WNYC, New York City's public radio outlet, *USA Today* editor Karen Jurgensen said she found an error in virtually every story written about her. Her interviewer, John Solomon, went on to cite studies showing that about half of all articles have at least one error. My experience is more in line with Jurgensen's: In my three years as a free-lance fact-checker for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, I have never checked a story that had no mistakes, whether five pages long or two paragraphs.

For me, this puts the current debate over corrections into perspective. Revelations of Jayson Blair's fifty or so corrections during his four years at *The New York Times* (apart from his plagiarism and fabrication) had a number of journalists saying proudly that they would have been fired for far less. That sentiment is scary, not least because it encourages delusions of accuracy.

Consider that *CJR*'s authors tend to be respected, skilled, conscientious, and working on long deadlines; and from what I have seen they all make mistakes. Just for variety, I called fact-checking chiefs at a couple of prominent publications, who agreed that mistakes are the rule, not the exception. Yvonne Rolzhausen, a senior editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, couldn't be sure she had ever seen a mistake-free article in eight years, but she says, "I doubt it, honestly."

In fairness, some of the "mistakes" I find are matters of interpretation, and authors usually agree to change them. Virtually all articles, though, contain errors on objective matters of fact: a year slightly off; old data; misspellings; widely reported information taken from secondary sources, but wrong. And of course, "facts" pulled from the writer's mental archives. Errors often turn up when the author says, "You don't need to check that, I know that's right." I can sometimes hear hostility at the beginning of the fact-checking process and shame at the end from the same person. Neither makes any sense to me, knowing what I know now — except when I get fact-checked myself.

Pound for pound, the most mistake-packed article I have ever checked was written by a Pulitzer Prize winner. As I approached the job, I felt I was on a futile mission. The piece seemed fine, the facts made sense, and most important, the narrative voice spoke with total authority. I could not imagine finding any mistakes here, but I'm paid by the hour so I set to work. Immediately, I found a significant error in the lead, then a cascade. The author, when asked for backup materials, moved from impatience to outright anger; then, when presented with the corrections, to gracious cooperation.

On the other hand, one of the most accurate articles I've checked — just one mistake, plus another the author had already caught and called in — was written by a former *Los Angeles Times* lawyer, Jeffrey S. Klein.

Journalists surely make mistakes often, but I think we don't — or can't — admit it to ourselves because the idea of a mistake is so stigmatized. It's a Catch-22. I think some reporters and their editors start to believe that unless a reader or listener telephones with a correction, they've made no mistakes. Then enough time goes by and they think they've gotten beyond mistakes. So then why double-check facts, especially the most basic ones? Why look for mistakes in reporting they know is good, when mistakes are so bad? In a perverse turn-about, the intense fear of mistakes just makes for more mistakes.

It would be nice if there were time and money to fact-check all our daily reporting, but there isn't. So mistakes need to be destigmatized, or re-stigmatized and dealt with accordingly. They should be treated like language errors, so reporters feel free to correct them at any stage in the process. It should raise no eyebrows to tell an editor, twenty minutes after you hit "send," "Wait, I got something wrong!" And in fact-heavy writing, we should know how important it is to seek errors out, because they are almost certainly there.

It would help if news consumers felt connected enough to us to point out a mistake every time they find one. But they don't, except perhaps in smaller markets where they feel they know us personally. So it's up to us to face reality. Doing otherwise may lead to fewer corrections, but that's not the same thing as accuracy. ■

*Ariel Hart is a free-lance fact-checker and writer based in Atlanta. She is also a stringer for The New York Times.*

Kennedy a terse note: "This does not represent us very well." Kennedy notes that the "story was corrected in a local newspaper, but that's 100,000 readers. The *Times* has over one million readers. The *Times* is a world-class, national newspaper, and the article questioned our credibility. It hurt us. Of course it hurt us."

■ Gary Ahlert, the owner of a small marketing firm in Connecticut, says he was also hurt by Blair. In November 1999, he was helping the *Times* with information for a story on white-collar crime against individuals and small businesses and the difficulty in prosecuting the cases. Ahlert had been looking for an investment loan and found an ad for one in, oddly enough, *The New York Times*: "Attention Brokers. Hard Money Financing. Ivex Financial." He checked it out and it seemed legitimate. Only it wasn't. After reporting the fraud to the government and getting nowhere, he thought it would be a good story idea and contacted the *Times*. Apparently, the *Times* agreed. "There was another reporter working on the story and she had all the facts correct," Ahlert says. "But she was reassigned and Blair came on. He made appointments. He blew off appointments." Ahlert says he gave Blair boxes of evidence for the article and when he finally met him, he says Blair was "compassionate and kind." Blair's article appeared on the front of the metro section on March 13, 2000. The story, which Ahlert thought would cast his business as a victim of white-collar crime, implied shady business deals on Ahlert's part and had many facts wrong, he says, such as what investments were made, and even the name of Ahlert's daughter. "Everything he wrote was fiction," Ahlert says. "He totally humiliated the business, my own business." What happened next may be equally shocking. "We just decided to let it drop," Ahlert says. "They're creating facts and we didn't want any more publicity. We were greatly embarrassed by the thing." Ahlert happens to be a former newspaper reporter, and says the incident changed him. "I used to believe in journalism," he says. "I had the highest regard for journalists. The *Times* can be used as toilet paper as far as I'm concerned." The *Times* finally made a correction on May 11, 2003, citing two inaccuracies. Ahlert contacted his attorneys and says he is considering his options, arguing that if the *Times* knew of Blair's behavior and didn't stop it, the newspaper should be held accountable.

■ Lieutenant Commander Jerry Rostad, the public affairs officer at the National Naval Medical Center, is more forgiving: "In any profession," he says, "there are a few bad apples." In a front-page story on April 19, 2003, Rostad saw Blair's deceit from the dateline: Bethesda. But: "He was never here, he was never at the hospital," Rostad says. "I knew everyone who was at the base. Some reporters did try and sneak in, but they were caught." Blair's story quoted six wounded marines at the hospital, some of whom were not even staying there at the time, Rostad says. Yet he didn't complain. "There were a couple of reasons why I didn't contact the *Times*: One, I was above my eyeballs in responding to queries. So I had to weigh minimizing the mistakes in one paper versus fifty media requests. Two, I likened it to a business relationship or a relationship you have with a neighbor. You have to think about whether you want to complain. I didn't want to willy-nilly call *The New York Times* and start World War III with them." Rostad says that one of the injured marines Blair quoted falsely had his mother call the *Times*. "She said who she was and why she was calling," Rostad says. "She's a marine mother and they didn't respond. That was a tough pill to swallow."

■ Even journalists were among those who failed to notify the *Times*

## THE ROMENESKO FACTOR

BY SUSAN E. TIFFT

Executive editors at *The New York Times* were once kings; now, apparently, they are prime ministers who can be recalled for what amounts to a no-confidence vote. And for the first time, the Internet played a role.

It was the newsroom's lack of confidence in Raines that mattered, of course, and the staff members' fierce rebellion that did him in. But the collection and dissemination of their wails on the Web added to its weight and velocity. For weeks, *Times* journalists posted internal memos and critical e-mail exchanges on the dominant Web site frequented by reporters, the site destination known simply as Romenesko ([www.poynter.org/romenesko](http://www.poynter.org/romenesko)).

The vitriol in those e-mails kept the story roiling, exposed cracks in the once vault-like newsroom, and chipped away at authority at the top. The effect was to help atomize the power of Raines and his managing editor, Gerald Boyd, and to some extent that of the publisher, Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. It wasn't exactly the slave uprising in Spartacus, but there were echoes.

It's a journalistic axiom that newsrooms aren't democracies — and shouldn't be. Someone has to create a vision for the paper and make final editorial decisions. But now, thanks to the Internet, every copy clerk and stringer can make his or her unhappiness known to millions. Michael Powell, chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, may have been comfortable effectively ignoring more than 700,000 e-mail and postcard dissents to the FCC's proposed changes in media ownership rules, but the *New York Times* publisher felt differently. He knew that a top editor's power derives in large part from the consent of the governed.

The Internet was only one of a number of factors in the unseating of Raines, who despite his manifold management failures is a superb journalist and a lyrical writer. That it was a factor at all is not necessarily a good thing. Journalists should hold their editors accountable, especially in matters of ethics, but newspapers have enough credibility problems without indulging in the Web equivalent of *Family Feud*. The long-term effects of this phenomenon remain to be seen. In the short term, what Raines learned — and other news executives may, too — is that in the whirling democracy of the Web, commanders who underestimate the power of their troops do so at their peril. ■

Susan E. Tift is a professor of journalism and public policy at Duke University and the co-author of *The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times*.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



about Blair's transgressions. When Blair called Lee Gardner, editor of the Baltimore *City Paper*, last December about a sensitive trial that had split Baltimore, Gardner says he was helpful, giving him some information, but stipulating that his quotes were not for attribution. But then Gardner saw his name and a quote the next day in the *Times*. Gardner says that there were two reasons he didn't call the *Times*: "One, it wasn't that big a deal, and two, I think I've gotten used to everyone saying 'I was misquoted' or 'That was taken out of context.'"

■ Second Lieutenant Cathy L. Milhoan, a spokeswoman for the 512th Airlift Wing at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware, also had polite interactions with Blair. In fact, he e-mailed her a link to the *Times*'s April 1, 2003, story in which she was quoted. Still, she

says, Blair got it wrong. "I saw I was misquoted and it bothered me because I spent a lot of time explaining that particular point to him," she says. Blair quoted her as saying of the reservists who staff the military mortuary there, "They have really been taxed both logistically and emotionally." But she says that no one felt "taxed" and that it was their duty. She claims that she never uses words like "logistically." "That's not the way I speak," she says. "None of the quotes were the way I spoke them. I called him and he apologized. He said 'I'm sorry, I must have gotten that wrong.'" There was also another error in the article, which Blair agreed was incorrect. But no corrections were made until the May 11 mea culpa. Further, Milhoan says that when she reread the story she felt as if she had read it before. She had. She keeps a file of all articles about Dover Air Force Base, and found that part of Blair's article had been plagiarized from the *Delaware State News*. When she consulted her logs, she discovered that Blair had never been to the base. But Milhoan didn't question Blair's dateline. Despite all this, she hasn't soured on journalism. "The *New York Times* is still a fine newspaper," she says. "This doesn't change what I think about them or the business."

■ One Blair article, published on September 16, 2001, that was not corrected in the May 11 piece was about a town ninety miles north of New York City. Kingston, New York, according to Blair, was struggling after an IBM plant closed there. But the plant wasn't even in that Hudson River city. It was in Ulster, a neighboring town. "Blair had started calling in July and August of 2001 and I spoke to him two times," says Thomas Collins, a local real-estate agent. "He interviewed me a couple of times on the phone for a half-hour each, and I sent him to other people. I gave him leads and set up an appointment with the mayor." Then he saw the article. "I read it and I couldn't believe how he butchered us," Collins says, of Blair's descriptions of Kingston's problems with drug abuse, homelessness, and crime. "Blair never even came up here. I didn't respond. When it comes to the media, I just leave it alone. In my point of view, so much damage was already done. And I thought nobody in the world read it just a few days after the tragedy of September 11." The story ran with a Kingston, New York, dateline and opens with this scene: "The weed-strewn parking lots and abandoned houses became a common sight here . . ."

James Maloney, the Ulster tax assessor, left two voice-mail messages for Blair about two factual errors in the article. Maloney says that on occasion, he has contacted newspapers about errors. "But no one has ever run a correction," he says. ■

Adeel Hassan is an assistant editor at CJR.

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# HOW TO WORRY ABOUT THE BLAIR AFFAIRS

BY RICHARD C. WALD

**N**ow that the shouting is over, a whispered question remains: Did *The New York Times's* enormous self-regard make more of this Jayson Blair problem than it was worth?

After all, there are historians lined up for the Blair Prize. And right now somewhere in the United States a lawyer is dipping into the funds of widows and orphans, a doctor is doing something truly stupid to a patient, an accountant is figuring out ways to cheat the government. For one of those licensed professionals to be worth four-plus pages in *The New York Times*, plus the cover of *Newsweek*, plus the comment of half the tribe that chatters, he or she would have to bring down Enron or find a cure for AIDS. And when have two stars of the business been dismissed because the staff was unhappy?

So the case of Jayson Blair is overblown, right? Wrong. It hurt the *Times*, which is a shame; it hurts journalism, though we'll get over it; but it hurts society in ways that are hardly remarked upon and need some discussion. What is at stake, oddly, is what was not said.

Our world is always in a state of flux. Except for brief flashes of self-rule, history is a litany of kings, emperors, despots, and petty chiefs, ruling with autocratic disregard. Only recently have large numbers of people tried to govern themselves. Older than most of our democracies are the voluntary associations. I went to a college that is almost 700 years old. Look back to the Masons or merchant guilds, look around to Kiwanis, Rotaries, book clubs, sailing clubs, and the like, and you find longevity based on willing association. Vaclav Havel lumped them together as civil society, the part of our lives outside the home and outside the government that totalitarian regimes hate and try to destroy.

In our civil society, under the great dispensation of the First Amendment and the way the courts have interpreted it, the press plays a unique role. It knits together the voluntary interests, it spreads the news of government and of opposition to government, it is the beginning of choice. Otis Chandler used to say that in Los Angeles, such community as existed was provided by the *Los Angeles Times*. Little else knitted it together. But you know all that.

Now we come to Jayson Blair and what did not happen.

He stole from *The Washington Post*, but the *Post* reporters did not complain. He made up quotes, but by and large, those quoted did not complain — or did so only feebly. Only late in the game, when he stole from the *San Antonio Express-News*, was he stopped.

Why? There are very few mutes who work as reporters for *The Washington Post*. They tend to read *The New York Times*.

Why didn't they complain? Everybody does it? People falsely quoted didn't complain. Because they thought "everyone does it"? Because they could not get through to the *Times*? Maybe because they don't care any more? For nice, chilling reading about how the press is becoming a remote bureaucracy, is becoming "them," look at some of the responses to the Associated Press Managing Editors' big survey of readers and sources. The first paragraph from the report by Carol Nunnelley and Phil Shook:

"Deborah Hudgins of Manchester, Md., has caught errors in her local newspaper but she doesn't bother to report them. 'What's the point?' she asked. 'Do they really care?'"

That is the rub.

In the wake of the Blair affair, news organizations throughout the country properly looked to how they do things. Truth is important to each one. Some commentators took glee in the *Times's* pain. Yet it might happen to them. And, in essence, journalism searched inward.

If enough people failed to complain about an institution as prominent as *The New York Times*, if people don't complain about the myriad other things we get wrong, then the separation between the press and the people has grown large and deep enough to be dangerous for all of us. We have developed for ourselves a society in which information flows through newspapers, television, cable, radio, Web sites, magazines, books, pamphlets, think-tanks, seminars, in unending talk. But talk is not communication. That depends on hearing, on all the things that make trust. As trust frays, cohesion fails, and we are left with mere words — our world of constant spin — and the triumph of the image.

Presidents don't land on aircraft carriers in jumpsuits because that's the way they normally behave. They do it because, across the babble, it is the image that provides the only cohesion, because we can attach to it the meaning that suits us. When information becomes transitory and not valuable, when it does not matter who brings it to you "because they're all alike," civil society is in trouble. The Ottoman empire lasted far longer than we have so far because it was based on power. When the power waned, the empire waned. Our society is based on information, jointly accepted as both true and worth having. If we think it is not true and it doesn't seem worth arguing over, we have a problem much larger than Mr. Blair or *The New York Times*. ■

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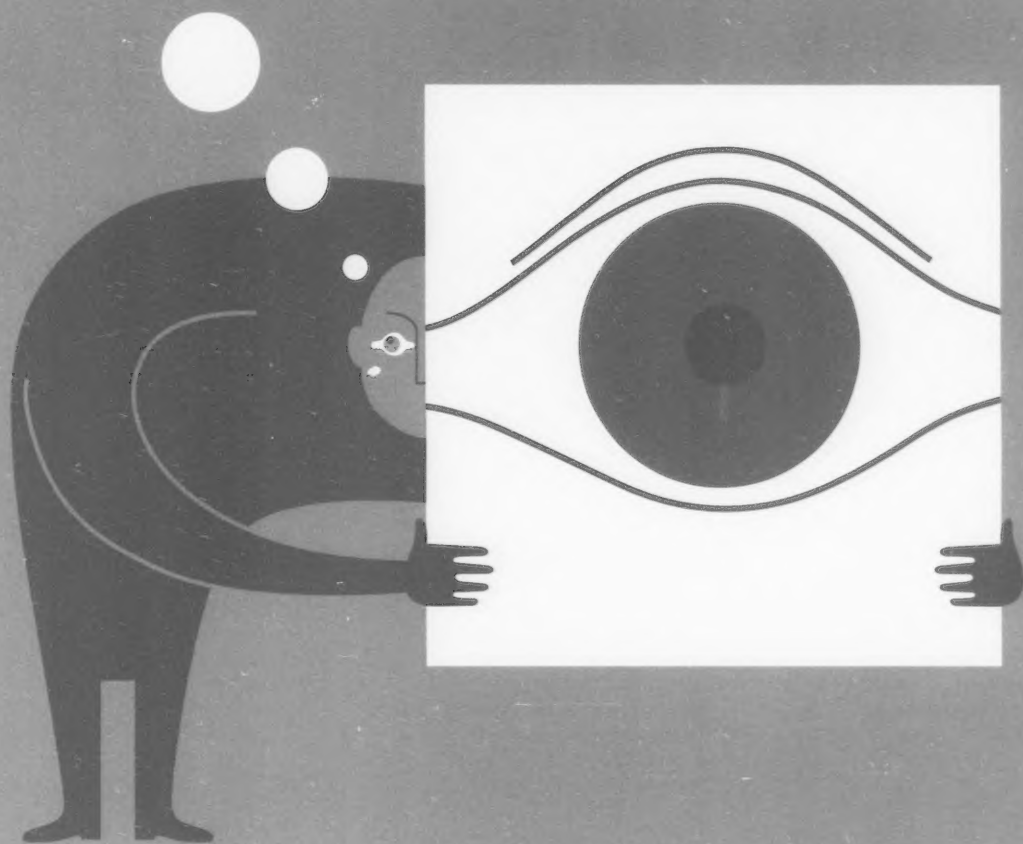
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# RE- THINKING OBJECTIVITY

*In a  
world of  
spin, our  
awkward  
embrace  
of an ideal  
can make us  
passive  
recipients  
of the  
news*

BY BRENT CUNNINGHAM

**I**n his March 6 press conference, in which he laid out his reasons for the coming war, President Bush mentioned al Qaeda or the attacks of September 11 fourteen times in fifty-two minutes. No one challenged him on it, despite the fact that the CIA had questioned the Iraq-al Qaeda connection, and that there has never been solid evidence marshaled to support the idea that Iraq was involved in the attacks of 9/11.



When Bush proposed his \$726 billion tax cut in January, his sales pitch on the plan's centerpiece — undoing the “double-taxation” on dividend earnings — was that “It’s unfair to tax money twice.” In the next two months, the tax plan was picked over in hundreds of articles and broadcasts, yet a Nexis database search turned up few news stories — notably, one by Donald Barlett and James Steele in *Time* on January 27, and another by Daniel Altman in the business section of *The New York Times* on January 21 — that explained in detail what was misleading about the president’s pitch: that in fact there is plenty of income that is doubly, triply, or even quadruply taxed, and that those other taxes affect many more people than the sliver who would benefit from the dividend tax cut.

Before the fighting started in Iraq, in the

dozens of articles and broadcasts that addressed the potential aftermath of a war, much was written and said about the maneuverings of the Iraqi exile community and the shape of a postwar government, about cost and duration and troop numbers. Important subjects all. But few of those stories, dating from late last summer, delved deeply into the numerous and plausible complications of the aftermath. That all changed on February 26, when President Bush spoke grandly of making Iraq a model for retooling the entire Middle East. After Bush’s speech “aftermath” articles began to flow like the waters of the Tigris — including cover stories in *Time* and *The New York Times Magazine* — culminating in *The Wall Street Journal*’s page-one story on March 17, just days before the first cruise missiles rained down on Baghdad, that revealed how the administration planned

to hand the multibillion-dollar job of rebuilding Iraq to U.S. corporations. It was as if the subject of the war’s aftermath was more or less off the table until the president put it there himself.

There is no single explanation for these holes in the coverage, but I would argue that our devotion to what we call “objectivity” played a role. It’s true that the Bush administration is like a clenched fist with information, one that won’t hesitate to hit back when pressed. And that reporting on the possible aftermath of a war before the war occurs, in particular, was a difficult and speculative story.

Yet these three examples — which happen to involve the current White House, although every White House spins stories — provide a window into a particular failure of the press: allowing

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the principle of objectivity to make us passive recipients of news, rather than aggressive analyzers and explainers of it. We all learned about objectivity in school or at our first job. Along with its twin sentries "fairness" and "balance," it defined journalistic standards.

Or did it? Ask ten journalists what objectivity means and you'll get ten different answers. Some, like the *Washington Post's* editor, Leonard Downie, define it so strictly that they refuse to vote lest they be forced to take sides. My favorite definition was from Michael Bugeja, who teaches journalism at Iowa State: "Objectivity is seeing the world as it is, not how you wish it were." In 1996 the Society of Professional Journalists acknowledged this dilemma and dropped "objectivity" from its ethics code. It also changed "the truth" to simply "truth."

## TRIPPING TOWARD THE TRUTH

As E.J. Dionne wrote in his 1996 book, *They Only Look Dead*, the press operates under a number of conflicting dictates: be neutral yet investigative; be disengaged but have an impact; be fair-minded but have an edge. Therein lies the nut of our tortured relationship with objectivity. Few would argue that complete objectivity is possible, yet we bristle when someone suggests we aren't being objective — or fair, or balanced — as if everyone agrees on what they all mean.

Over the last dozen years a cottage industry of bias police has sprung up to exploit this fissure in the journalistic psyche, with talk radio leading the way followed by Shout TV and books like Ann Coulter's *Slander* and Bernard Goldberg's *Bias*. Now the left has begun firing back, with Eric Alterman's book *What Liberal Media?* (CJR, March/April) and a group of wealthy Democrats' plans for a liberal radio network. James Carey, a journalism scholar at Columbia, points out that we are entering a new age of partisanship. One result is a hypersensitivity among the press to charges of bias, and it shows up everywhere: In October 2001, with the war in Afghanistan under way, then CNN chairman Walter Isaacson sent a memo to his foreign correspondents telling them to "balance" reports of Afghan "casualties or hardship" with reminders to viewers that this was, after all, in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11. More recently, a CJR intern, calling newspaper

letters-page editors to learn whether reader letters were running for or against the looming war in Iraq, was told by the letters editor at *The Tennessean* that letters were running 70 percent against the war, but that the editors were trying to run as many prowar letters as possible lest they be accused of bias.

Objectivity has persisted for some valid reasons, the most important being that nothing better has replaced it. And plenty of good journalists believe in it, at least as a necessary goal. Objectivity, or the pursuit of it, separates us from the unbridled partisanship found in much of the European press. It helps us make decisions quickly — we are disinterested observers after all — and it protects us from the consequences of what we write. We'd like to think it buoys our embattled credibility, though the deafening silence of many victims of Jayson Blair's fabrications would argue otherwise. And as we descend into this new age of partisanship, our readers need, more than ever, reliable reporting that tells them what is true when that is knowable, and pushes as close to truth as possible when it is not.

But our pursuit of objectivity can trip us up on the way to "truth." Objectivity excuses lazy reporting. If you're on deadline and all you have is "both sides of the story," that's often good enough. It's not that such stories laying out the parameters of a debate have no value for readers, but too often, in our obsession with, as *The Washington Post's* Bob Woodward puts it, "the latest," we fail to push the story, incrementally, toward a deeper understanding of what is true and what is false. Steven R. Weisman, the chief diplomatic correspondent for *The New York Times* and a believer in the goal of objectivity ("even though we fall short of the ideal every day"), concedes that he felt obliged to dig more when he was an editorial writer, and did not have to be objective. "If you have to decide who is right, then you must do more reporting," he says. "I pressed the reporting further because I didn't have the luxury of saying X says this and Y says this and you, dear reader, can decide who is right."

It exacerbates our tendency to rely on official sources, which is the easiest, quickest way to get both the "he said" and the "she said," and, thus, "balance." According to numbers from the media analyst Andrew Tyndall, of the 414 stories on Iraq broadcast on NBC, ABC, and CBS from last September to February, all but thirty-

four originated at the White House, Pentagon, and State Department. So we end up with too much of the "official" truth.

More important, objectivity makes us wary of seeming to argue with the president — or the governor, or the CEO — and risk losing our access. Jonathan Weisman, an economics reporter for *The Washington Post*, says this about the fear of losing access: "If you are perceived as having a political bias, or a slant, you're screwed."

Finally, objectivity makes reporters hesitant to inject issues into the news that aren't already out there. "News is driven by the zeitgeist," says Jonathan Weisman, "and if an issue isn't part of the current zeitgeist then it will be a tough sell to editors." But who drives the zeitgeist, in Washington at least? The administration. In short, the press's awkward embrace of an impossible ideal limits its ability to help set the agenda.

This is not a call to scrap objectivity, but rather a search for a better way of thinking about it, a way that is less restrictive and more grounded in reality. As Eric Black, a reporter at the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, says, "We need a way to both do our job and defend it."

## AN IDEAL'S TROUBLED PAST

American journalism's honeymoon with objectivity has been brief. The press began to embrace objectivity in the middle of the nineteenth century, as society turned away from religion and toward science and empiricism to explain the world. But in his 1998 book, *Just the Facts*, a history of the origins of objectivity in U.S. journalism, David Mindich argues that by the turn of the twentieth century, the flaws of objective journalism were beginning to show. Mindich shows how "objective" coverage of lynching in the 1890s by *The New York Times* and other papers created a false balance on the issue and failed "to recognize a truth, that African-Americans were being terrorized across the nation."

After World War I, the rise of public relations and the legacy of wartime propaganda — in which journalists such as Walter Lippman had played key roles — began to undermine reporters' faith in facts. The war, the Depression, and Roosevelt's New Deal raised complex issues that defied journalism's attempt to distill them into simple truths. As a result, the use of bylines increased (an early nod to the fact that



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## Objectivity makes reporters hesitant to inject issues into the news that aren't already out there.

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news is touched by human frailty), the political columnist crawled from the primordial soup, and the idea of "interpretive reporting" emerged. Still, as Michael Schudson argued in his 1978 book *Discovering the News*, journalism clung to objectivity as the faithful cling to religion, for guidance in an uncertain world. He wrote: "From the beginning, then, criticism of the 'myth' of objectivity has accompanied its enunciation . . . . Journalists came to believe in objectivity, to the extent that they did, because they wanted to, needed to, were forced by ordinary human aspiration to seek escape from their own deep convictions of doubt and drift."

By the 1960s, objectivity was again under fire, this time to more fundamental and lasting effect. Straight, "objective" coverage of McCarthyism a decade earlier had failed the public, leading Alan Barth, an editorial writer at *The Washington Post*, to tell a 1952 gathering of the Association for Education in Journalism: "There can be little doubt that the way [Senator Joseph McCarthy's charges] have been reported in most papers serves Senator McCarthy's partisan political purposes much more than it serves the purposes of the press, the interest of truth." Government lies about the U2 spy flights, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Vietnam War all cast doubt on the ability of "objective" journalism to get at anything close to the truth. The New Journalism of Tom Wolfe and Norman Mailer was in part a reaction to what many saw as the failings of mainstream reporting. In Vietnam, many of the beat reporters who arrived believing in objectivity eventually realized, if they stayed long enough, that such an approach wasn't sufficient. Says John Laurence, a former CBS News correspondent, about his years covering Vietnam: "Because the war went on for so long and so much evidence accumulated to suggest it was a losing cause, and that in the process we were de-

stroying the Vietnamese and ourselves, I felt I had a moral obligation to report my views as much as the facts."

As a result of all these things, American journalism changed. "Vietnam and Watergate destroyed what I think was a genuine sense that our officials knew more than we did and acted in good faith," says Anthony Lewis, the former *New York Times* reporter and columnist. We became more sophisticated in our understanding of the limits of objectivity. And indeed, the parameters of modern journalistic objectivity allow reporters quite a bit of leeway to analyze, explain, and put news in context, thereby helping guide readers and viewers through the flood of information.

Still, nothing replaced objectivity as journalism's dominant professional norm. Some 75 percent of journalists and news executives in a 1999 Pew Research Center survey said it was possible to obtain a true, accurate, and widely agreed-upon account of an event. More than two-thirds thought it feasible to develop "a systematic method to cover events in a disinterested and fair way." The survey also offered another glimpse of the objectivity fissure: more than two-thirds of the print press in the Pew survey also said that "providing an interpretation of the news is a core principle," while less than half of those in television news agreed with that.

### THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

If objectivity's philosophical hold on journalism has eased a bit since the 1960s, a number of other developments have bound us more tightly to the objective ideal and simultaneously exacerbated its shortcomings. Not only are journalists operating under conflicting orders, as E.J. Dionne argued, but their corporate owners don't exactly trumpet the need to rankle the status quo. It is per-

haps important to note that one of the original forces behind the shift to objectivity in the nineteenth century was economic. To appeal to as broad an audience as possible, first the penny press and later the new wire services gradually stripped news of "partisan" context. Today's owners have squeezed the newshole, leaving less space for context and analysis.

If space is a problem, time is an even greater one. The nonstop news cycle leaves reporters less time to dig, and encourages reliance on official sources who can provide the information quickly and succinctly. "We are slaves to the incremental daily development," says one White House correspondent, "but you are perceived as having a bias if you don't cover it." This lack of time makes a simpleminded and lazy version of objectivity all the more tempting. In *The American Prospect* of November 6, 2000, Chris Mooney wrote about how "e-spin," a relentless diet of canned attacks and counterattacks e-mailed from the Bush and Gore campaigns to reporters, was winding up, virtually unedited, in news stories. "Lazy reporters may be seduced by the ease of readily provided research," Mooney wrote. "That's not a new problem, except that the prevalence of electronic communication has made it easier to be lazy."

Meanwhile, the Internet and cable news's Shout TV, which drive the nonstop news cycle, have also elevated the appeal of "attitude" in the news, making the balanced, measured report seem anachronistic. In the January/February issue of *CJR*, young journalists asked to create their dream newspaper wanted more point-of-view writing in news columns. They got a heavy dose of it during the second gulf war, with news "anchors" like Fox's Neil Cavuto saying of those who opposed the war, "You were sickening then; you are sickening now."

Perhaps most ominous of all, public relations, whose birth early in the twentieth century rattled the world of objective journalism, has matured into a spin monster so ubiquitous that nearly every word a reporter hears from an official source has been shaped and polished to proper effect. Consider the memo from the Republican strategist Frank Luntz, as described in a March 2 *New York Times* story, that urged the party — and President Bush — to soften their language on the environment to appeal to suburban voters. "Climate change" instead of "global warming," "conservationist" rather than "environmentalist." To the

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extent that the threat of being accused of bias inhibits reporters from cutting through this kind of manipulation, challenging it, and telling readers about it, then journalism's dominant professional norm needs a new set of instructions.

Joan Didion got at this problem while taking Bob Woodward to task in a 1996 piece in *The New York Review of Books* for writing books that she argued were too credulous, that failed to counter the possibility that his sources were spinning him. She wrote:

The genuflection toward "fairness" is a familiar newsroom piety, in practice the excuse for a good deal of autopilot reporting and lazy thinking but in theory a benign ideal. In Washington, however, a community in which the management of news has become the single overriding preoccupation of the core industry, what "fairness" has often come to mean is a scrupulous passivity, an agreement to cover the story not as it is occurring but as it is presented, which is to say as it is manufactured.

Asked about such criticism, Woodward says that for his books he has the time and the space and the sources to actually uncover what really happened, not some manufactured version of it. "The best testimony to that," he says, "is that the critics never suggest how any of it is manufactured, that any of it is wrong." Then, objectivity rears its head. "What they seem to be saying," Woodward says of his critics, "is that I refuse to use the information I have to make a political argument, and they are right, I won't." Yet some of Woodward's critics do suggest how his material is manufactured. Christopher Hitchens, reviewing Woodward's latest book, *Bush at War*, in the June issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, argues that, while reporting on a significant foreign-policy debate, Woodward fully presents the point of view of his cooperative sources, but fails to report deeply on the other sides of the argument. Thus he presents an incomplete picture. "Pseudo-objectivity in the nation's capital," Hitchens writes, "is now overripe for regime change."

## TO FILL THE VOID

Jason Riley is a young reporter at the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Along with a fellow reporter, R.G. Dunlop, he won a Polk award this year for a series on dysfunction in the county courts, in which

hundreds of felony cases dating back to 1983 were lost and never resolved. Riley and Dunlop's series was a classic example of enterprise reporting: poking around the courthouse, Riley came across one felony case that had been open for several years. That led to more cases, then to a drawer full of open cases. No one was complaining, at least publicly, about this problem. In a first draft, Riley wrote that the system was flawed because it let cases fall off the docket and just disappear for years. "I didn't think it needed attribution because it was the conclusion I had drawn after six months of investigation," he writes in an e-mail. But his editor sent it back with a note: "Says who?"

In a follow-up profile of the county's lead prosecutor, a man Riley has covered for three years, many sources would not criticize the prosecutor on the record. He "knew what people thought of him, knew what his strengths and weaknesses were," Riley says. "Since no one was openly discussing issues surrounding him, I raised many in my profile without attribution." Again his editors hesitated. There were discussions about the need to remain objective. "Some of my conclusions and questions were left out because no one else brought them up on the record," he says.

Riley discovered a problem on his own, reported the hell out of it, developed an understanding of the situation, and reached some conclusions based on that. No official sources were speaking out about it, so he felt obliged to fill that void. Is that bias? Good reporters do it, or attempt to do it, all the time. The strictures of objectivity can make it difficult. "I think most journalists will admit to feeding sources the information we want to hear, for quotes or attribution, just so we can make the crucial point we are not allowed to make ourselves," Riley says. "But why not? As society's watchdogs, I think we should be asking questions, we should be bringing up problems, possible solutions... writing what we know to be true."

Last fall, when America and the world were debating whether to go to war in Iraq, no one in the Washington establishment wanted to talk much about the aftermath of such a war. For the Bush administration, attempting to rally support for a preemptive war, messy discussions about all that could go wrong in the aftermath were unhelpful. Anything is better than Saddam, the argument went.

The Democrats, already wary of being labeled unpatriotic, spoke their piece in October when they voted to authorize the use of force in Iraq, essentially putting the country on a war footing. Without the force of a "she said" on the aftermath story, it was largely driven by the administration, which is to say stories were typically framed by what the administration said it planned to do: work with other nations to build democracy. Strike a blow to terrorists. Stay as long as we need to and not a minute longer. Pay for it all with Iraqi oil revenue. There were some notable exceptions — a piece by Anthony Shadid in the October 20 *Boston Globe*, for instance, and another on September 22 by James Dao in *The New York Times*, pushed beyond the administration's broad assumptions about what would happen when Saddam was gone — but most of the coverage included only boilerplate reminders that Iraq is a fractious country and bloody reprisals are likely, that tension between the Kurds and Turks might be a problem, and that Iran has designs on the Shiite region of southern Iraq.

David House, the reader advocate for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, wrote a piece on March 23 that got at the press's limitations in setting the agenda. "Curiously, for all the technology the news media have, for all the gifted minds that make it all work... it's a simple thing to stop the media cold. Say nothing, hide documents."

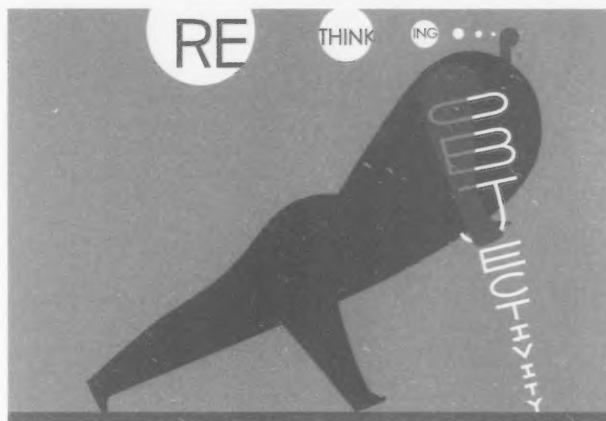
In November, James Fallows wrote a cover story for *The Atlantic Monthly* entitled "The Fifty-First State? The Inevitable Aftermath of Victory in Iraq." In it, with the help of regional experts, historians, and retired military officers, he gamed out just how difficult the aftermath could be. Among the scenarios he explored: the financial and logistical complications caused by the destruction of Baghdad's infrastructure; the possibility that Saddam Hussein would escape and join Osama bin Laden on the Most Wanted list; how the dearth of Arabic speakers in the U.S. government would hinder peacekeeping and other aftermath operations; how the need for the U.S., as the occupying power, to secure Iraq's borders would bring it face to face with Iran, another spoke in the "axis of evil"; the complications of working with the United Nations after it refused to support the war; what to do about the Iraqi debt from, among other things, UN-imposed repara-

tions after the first gulf war, which some estimates put as high as \$400 billion.

Much of this speculation has since come to pass and is bedeviling the U.S.'s attempt to stabilize — let alone democratize — Iraq. So are some other post-war realities that were either too speculative or too hypothetical to be given much air in the prewar debate. Looting, for instance, and general lawlessness. The fruitless (thus far) search for weapons of mass destruction. The inability to quickly restore power and clean water. A decimated health-care system. The difficulty of establishing an interim Iraqi government, and the confusion over who exactly should run things in the meantime. The understandably shallow reservoir of patience among the long-suffering Iraqis. The hidden clause in Halliburton's contract to repair Iraq's oil wells that also, by the way, granted it control of production and distribution, despite the administration's assurances that the Iraqis would run their own oil industry.

In the rush to war, how many Americans even heard about some of these possibilities? Of the 574 stories about Iraq that aired on NBC, ABC, and CBS evening news broadcasts between September 12 (when Bush addressed the UN) and March 7 (a week and a half before the war began), only twelve dealt primarily with the potential aftermath, according to Andrew Tyndall's numbers.

The Republicans were saying only what was convenient, thus the "he said." The Democratic leadership was saying little, so there was no "she said." "Journalists are never going to fill the vacuum left by a weak political opposition," says *The New York Times's* Steven R. Weisman. But why not? If something important is being ignored, doesn't the press have an obligation to force our elected officials to address it? We have the ability, even on considerably less important matters than war and nation-building. Think of the dozens of articles *The New York Times* published between July 10, 2002 and March 31 about the Augusta National Country Club's exclusion of women members, including the one from November 25 that carried the headline CBS STAYING SILENT IN DEBATE ON WOMEN JOINING AUGUSTA. Why couldn't there have been headlines last fall that read: BUSH STILL MUM ON AFTERMATH, OR BEYOND SADDAM: WHAT COULD GO RIGHT, AND WHAT COULD GO WRONG? And while you're at it, consider the criticism the



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*Times's* mini-crusade on Augusta engendered in the media world, as though an editor's passion for an issue never drives coverage.

This is not inconsequential nitpicking. *The New Yorker's* editor, David Remnick, who has written in support of going to war with Iraq, wrote of the aftermath in the March 31 issue: "An American presence in Baghdad will carry with it risks and responsibilities that will shape the future of the United States in the world." The press not only could have prepared the nation and its leadership for the aftermath we are now witnessing, but should have.

## THE REAL BIAS

In the early 1990s, I was a statehouse reporter for the *Charleston Daily Mail* in West Virginia. Every time a bill was introduced in the House to restrict access to abortion, the speaker, who was solidly pro-choice, sent the bill to the health committee, which was chaired by a woman who was also pro-choice. Of course, the bills never emerged from that committee. I was green and, yes, pro-choice, so it took a couple of years of witnessing this before it sunk in that — as the antiabortion activists had been telling me from day one — the committee was stacked with pro-choice votes and that

this was how "liberal" leadership killed the abortion bills every year while appearing to let the legislative process run its course. Once I understood, I eagerly wrote that story, not only because I knew it would get me on page one, but also because such political maneuverings offended my reporter's sense of fairness. The bias, ultimately, was toward the story.

Reporters are biased, but not in the oversimplified, left-right way that Ann Coulter and the rest of the bias cops would have everyone believe. As Nicholas Confessore argued in *The American Prospect*, most of the loudest bias-spotters were not reared in a newsroom. They come from politics, where everything is driven by ideology. Voting Democratic and not going to church — two bits of demography often trotted out to show how liberal the press is — certainly have some bearing on one's interpretation of events. But to leap to the conclusion that reporters use their precious column inches to push a left-wing agenda is specious reasoning at its worst. We all have our biases, and they can be particularly pernicious when they are unconscious. Arguably the most damaging bias is rarely discussed — the bias born of class. A number of people interviewed for this story said that the lack of socioeconomic diversity in the newsroom is one of American journalism's biggest blind spots. Most newsroom diversity efforts, though,

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focus on ethnic, racial, and gender minorities, which can often mean people with different skin color but largely the same middle-class background and aspirations. At a March 13 panel on media bias at Columbia's journalism school, John Leo, a columnist for *U.S. News & World Report*, said, "It used to be that anybody could be a reporter by walking in the door. It's a little harder to do that now, and you don't get the working-class Irish poor like Hamill or Breslin or me. What you get is people from Ivy League colleges with upper-class credentials, what you get is people who more and more tend to be and act alike." That, he says, makes it hard for a newsroom to spot its own biases.

Still, most reporters' real biases are not what political ideologues tend to think. "Politically I'm a reporter," says Eric Nalder, an investigative reporter at the *San Jose Mercury News*. Reporters are biased toward conflict because it is more interesting than stories without conflict; we are biased toward sticking with the pack because it is safe; we are biased toward event-driven coverage because it is easier; we are biased toward existing narratives because they are safe and easy. Consider the story — written by reporters around the country — of how Kenneth L. Lay, the former CEO of Enron, encouraged employees to buy company stock as he was secretly dumping his. It was a conveniently damning narrative, and easy to believe. Only it turned out, some two years later, to be untrue, leading *The New York Times's* Kurt Eichenwald to write a story correcting the record on February 9.

Mostly, though, we are biased in favor of getting the story, regardless of whose ox is being gored. Listen to Daniel Bice, an investigative columnist at the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, summarize his reporting philosophy: "Try not to be boring, be a reliable source of information, cut through the political, corporate, and bureaucratic bullshit, avoid partisanship, and hold politicians' feet to the fire." It would be tough to find a reporter who disagrees with any of that.

In his 1979 book *Deciding What's News*, the Columbia sociologist Herbert Gans defined what he called the journalist's "paraideology," which, he says, unconsciously forms and strengthens much of what we think of as news judgment. This consists largely of a number of "enduring values" — such as "altruistic democracy" and "responsible capitalism" — that are reformist, not partisan. "In re-

ality," Gans writes, "the news is not so much conservative or liberal as it is reformist; indeed, the enduring values are very much like the values of the Progressive movement of the early twentieth century." My abortion story, then, came from my sense that what was happening violated my understanding of "altruistic democracy." John Laurence distills Gans's paraideology into simpler terms: "We are for honesty, fairness, courage, humility. We are against corruption, exploitation, cruelty, criminal behavior, violence, discrimination, torture, abuse of power, and many other things." Clifford Levy, a reporter for *The New York Times* whose series on abuse in New York's homes for the mentally ill won a Pulitzer this year, says, "Of all the praise I got for the series, the most meaningful was from other reporters at the paper who said it made them proud to work there because it was a classic case of looking out for those who can't look out for themselves."

This "paraideology," James Carey explains, can lead to charges of liberal bias. "There is a bit of the reformer in anyone who enters journalism," he says. "And reformers are always going to make conservatives uncomfortable to an extent because conservatives, by and large, want to preserve the status quo."

Gans, though, notes a key flaw in the journalist's paraideology. "Journalists cannot exercise news judgment," he writes, "without a composite of nation, society, and national and social institutions in their collective heads, and this picture is an aggregate of reality judgments . . . . In doing so, they cannot leave room for the reality judgments that, for example, poor people have about America; nor do they ask, or even think of asking, the kinds of questions about the country that radicals, ultraconservatives, the religiously orthodox, or social scientists ask as a result of their reality judgments."

This understanding of "the other" has always been — and will always be — a central challenge of journalism. No individual embodies all the perspectives of a society. But we are not served in this effort by a paralyzing fear of being accused of bias. In their recent book *The Press Effect*, Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman make a strong case that this fear was a major factor in the coverage of the Florida recount of the 2000 presidential election, and its influence on journalists was borne out in my reporting for this

piece. "Our paper is under constant criticism by people alleging various forms of bias," says the *Star-Tribune's* Eric Black. "And there is a daily effort to perform in ways that will make it harder to criticize. Some are reasonable, but there is a line you can cross after which you are avoiding your duties to truth-telling." In a March 10 piece critical of the press's performance at Bush's prewar press conference, *USA Today's* Peter Johnson quoted Sam Donaldson as saying that it is difficult for the media — especially during war — "to press very hard when they know that a large segment of the population doesn't want to see a president whom they have anointed having to squirm." If we're about to go to war — especially one that is controversial — shouldn't the president squirm?

It is important, always, for reporters to understand their biases, to understand what the accepted narratives are, and to work against them as much as possible. This might be less of a problem if our newsrooms were more diverse — intellectually and socioeconomically as well as in gender, race, and ethnicity — but it would still be a struggle. There is too much easy opinion passing for journalism these days, and this is in no way an attempt to justify that. Quite the opposite. We need deep reporting and real understanding, but we also need reporters to acknowledge all that they don't know, and not try to mask that shortcoming behind a gloss of attitude, or drown it in a roar of oversimplified assertions.

## TOWARD A BETTER DEFINITION OF OBJECTIVITY

In the last two years, Archbishop Desmond Tutu has been mentioned in more than 3,000 articles on the Nexis database, and at least 388 (11 percent) included in the same breath the fact that he was a Nobel Peace Prize winner. The same search criteria found that Yasser Arafat turned up in almost 96,000 articles, but only 177 (less than .2 percent) mentioned that he won the Nobel prize. When we move beyond stenography, reporters make a million choices, each one subjective. When, for example, is it relevant to point out, in a story about Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, that the U.S. may have helped Saddam Hussein build those weapons in the 1980s? Every time? Never?



The rules of objectivity don't help us answer such questions. But there are some steps we can take to clarify what we do and help us move forward with confidence. A couple of modest proposals:

Journalists (and journalism) must acknowledge, humbly and publicly, that what we do is far more subjective and far less detached than the aura of objectivity implies — and the public wants to believe. If we stop claiming to be mere objective observers, it will not end the charges of bias but will allow us to defend what we do from a more realistic, less hypocritical position.

Secondly, we need to free (and encourage) reporters to develop expertise and to use it to sort through competing claims, identify and explain the underlying assumptions of those claims, and make judgments about what readers and viewers need to know to understand what is happening. In short, we need them to be more willing to "adjudicate factual disputes," as Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman argue in *The Press Effect*. Bill Marimow, the editor of the Baltimore *Sun*, talks of reporters "mastering" their beats. "We want our reporters to be analysts," he told a class at Columbia in March. "Becoming an expert, and mastering the whole range of truth about issues will give you the ability to make independent judgments."

Timothy Noah, writing in *The Washington Monthly* for a 1999 symposium on objectivity, put it this way: "A good reporter who is well-steeped in his subject matter and who isn't out to prove his cleverness, but rather is sweating out a detailed understanding of a topic worth exploring, will probably develop intelligent opinions that will inform and perhaps be expressed in his journalism." This happens every day in ways large and small, but it still happens too rarely. In a March 18 piece headlined BUSH CLINGS TO DUBIOUS ALLEGATIONS ABOUT IRAQ, *The Washington Post's* Walter Pincus and Dana Milbank laid out all of Bush's "allegations" about Saddam Hussein "that have been challenged — and in some cases disproved — by the United Nations, European governments, and even U.S. intelligence." It was noteworthy for its bluntness, and for its lack of an "analysis" tag. In commenting on that story, Steven Weisman of *The New York Times* illustrates how conflicted journalism is over whether such a piece belongs in the news columns: "It's a very good piece, but it is very tendentious," he says. "It's interesting that the editors didn't put it on page one, because it would look like they are calling

Bush a liar. Maybe we should do more pieces like it, but you must be careful not to be argumentative."

Some reporters work hard to get these same "argumentative" ideas into their stories in more subtle ways. Think of Jason Riley's comment about "feeding information" to sources. Steven Weisman calls it making it part of the "tissue" of the story. For example, in a March 17 report on the diplomatic failures of the Bush administration, Weisman worked in the idea that the CIA was questioning the Iraq-al Qaeda connection by attributing it to European officials as one explanation for why the U.S. *casus belli* never took hold in the UN.

The test, though, should not be whether it is tendentious, but whether it is true.

There are those who will argue that if you start fooling around with the standard of objectivity you open the door to partisanship. But mainstream reporters by and large are not ideological warriors. They are imperfect people performing a difficult job that is crucial to society. Letting them write what they know and encouraging them to dig toward some deeper understanding of things is not biased, it is essential. Reporters should feel free, as Daniel Bice says, to "call it as we see it, but not be committed to one side or the other." Their



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**Liza Mundy**, staff writer, *The Washington Post*

Project: Reproductive technology, and the ethical dilemmas that new, fast-emerging techniques present to doctors, policymakers, and the many patients availing themselves of advances in fertility medicine.

**Deborah L. Shelton**, medical and public health reporter, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Project: The drive to increase the number of live organ donors: the medical, ethical, social, economic and other implications.

**Oriana Zill de Granados**, staff reporter/producer, Center for Investigative Reporting, San Francisco

Project: Gun violence as a public health issue, focused on gun violence among Latino youth and its impact on communities in California and nationwide.

In 2004, the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program will again award up to six fellowships to print, on-line, television and radio journalists and editors interested in health policy, health care financing and public health issues. Information about the 2004 program will be available shortly, with applications due in March 2004. The aim is to provide journalists with a highly flexible range of opportunities to pursue individual projects, combined with group briefings and site visits on a wide range of health and social policy issues.

For more information, or to apply for the 2004 awards, visit our website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org); or write/e-mail:

Penny Duckham  
Executive Director of the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program  
Kaiser Family Foundation  
2400 Sand Hill Road  
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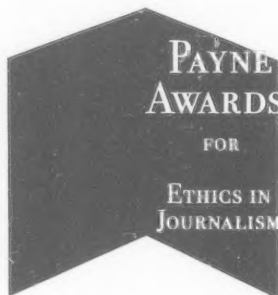
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professional values make them, Herbert Gans argues, akin to reformers, and they should embrace that aspect of what they do, not hide it for fear of being slapped with a bias charge. And when actual bias seeps in — as it surely will — the self-policing in the newsroom must be vigorous. Witness the memo John Carroll, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, wrote last month to his staff after a front-page piece on a new Texas abortion law veered left of center: "I want everyone to understand how serious I am about purging all political bias from our coverage."

Journalists have more tools today than ever to help them "adjudicate factual disputes." In 1993, before the computer-age version of "precision journalism" had taken root in the newsroom, Steve Doig helped *The Miami Herald* win a Pulitzer with his computer-assisted stories that traced damage done by Hurricane Andrew to shoddy home construction and failed governmental oversight of builders. "Precision journalism is arguably activist, but it helps us approach the unobtainable goal of objectivity more than traditional reporting strategies," says Doig, who now teaches computer-assisted reporting at Arizona State University. "It allows you to measure a problem, gives you facts that are less controvertible. Without the computer power, our Hurricane Andrew stories would have essentially been finger-pointing stories, balanced with builders saying there is no way any structure could have withstood such winds."

On April 1, Ron Martz, a reporter from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* embedded with the Army in Iraq, delivered a "war diary" entry on National Public Radio in which he defended his battlefield decision to drop his reporter's detachment and take a soldier's place holding an intravenous drip bag and comforting a wounded Iraqi civilian. The "ethicists," Martz said on NPR, tell us this is murky territory. That Martz, an accomplished reporter, should worry at all that his reputation could suffer from something like this says much about journalism's relationship with objectivity. Martz concluded that he is a human being first and a reporter second, and was comfortable with that. Despite all our important and necessary attempts to minimize our humanity, it can't be any other way. ■

*Brent Cunningham is CJR's managing editor.*

# CALIFORNIA TEACHERS ASSOCIATION



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- **Patti Rasmussen**, *The Signal*, for Continuous Coverage of Public Schools/Education Issues
- **Patti Rasmussen**, *The Signal*, for a Feature Story, "Mr. & Mrs. Education"
- **Stefanie Knapp**, *The Los Angeles Daily Journal*, for a Series, "Tensions Mount as Students Prep for Battle"
- **Kara Platoni**, *The East Bay Express*, for a Feature, "The Queen Must Go..."
- **Mark McDermott**, *The Easy Reader*, for a Series, "Contract Negotiations"
- **Kathryn Baron**, *KQED-FM, San Francisco*, for a Newscast
- **KNX 1070 News Radio**, Los Angeles, for Editorials/PSAs
- **Pat Thurston**, *KSRO-AM, Santa Rosa*, for a Talk Show
- **KQED-FM "Forum," San Francisco**, Locally Produced News-Talk/Call in
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# The Avenger

## Sy Hersh, Then and Now

BY SCOTT SHERMAN

**O**n a humid morning in late April, a group of students from Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism attended a two-hour seminar at ABC News in Washington. The topic was state secrets and anti-leak legislation, and the session was organized by Richard Wald, a professor of journalism at Columbia.

At 11:05, the guest speakers for the second hour — Seymour Hersh and his old friend, the journalist David Wise — stride into the conference room. Hersh is laughing and making jokes. He is wearing a jacket and tie, but his belt buckle is slightly awry.

Wald, the moderator, begins by summarizing the remarks of the previous speaker — Chris Ford, a smooth, clean-cut, recently departed general counsel of the Senate Intelligence Committee, who helped draft the anti-leak legislation that some have referred to as the “official secrets act.” Ford himself has left the room. “Ford’s been saying leaks are terrible,”

*In the 1960s and  
early 1970s, his intrepid  
reporting, combined with  
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But journalism has  
changed, and so has  
Hersh. To what extent  
is he the same man —  
and the same journalist  
— he was then?*

Wald says. Hersh is rocking back and forth in his swivel chair, taking in the professor’s summary. “Here are two guys,” Wald continues, “who don’t exactly live off leaks, but have in the past used them to great advantage for the general public. I throw the floor open to questions.”

Hersh’s jokes have ceased. Now he’s prepared for combat. His voice is full of rough edges.

Hersh: “Did Chris Ford say where else he’s worked? Did he mention or give his résumé?”

Wald (with some irritation): “No, I did not ask him to do that. Where else did he work, Sy?”

Hersh: “It doesn’t matter. If he didn’t give it, then . . . you know . . . it’s his . . . he’s been inside, he’s been inside.”

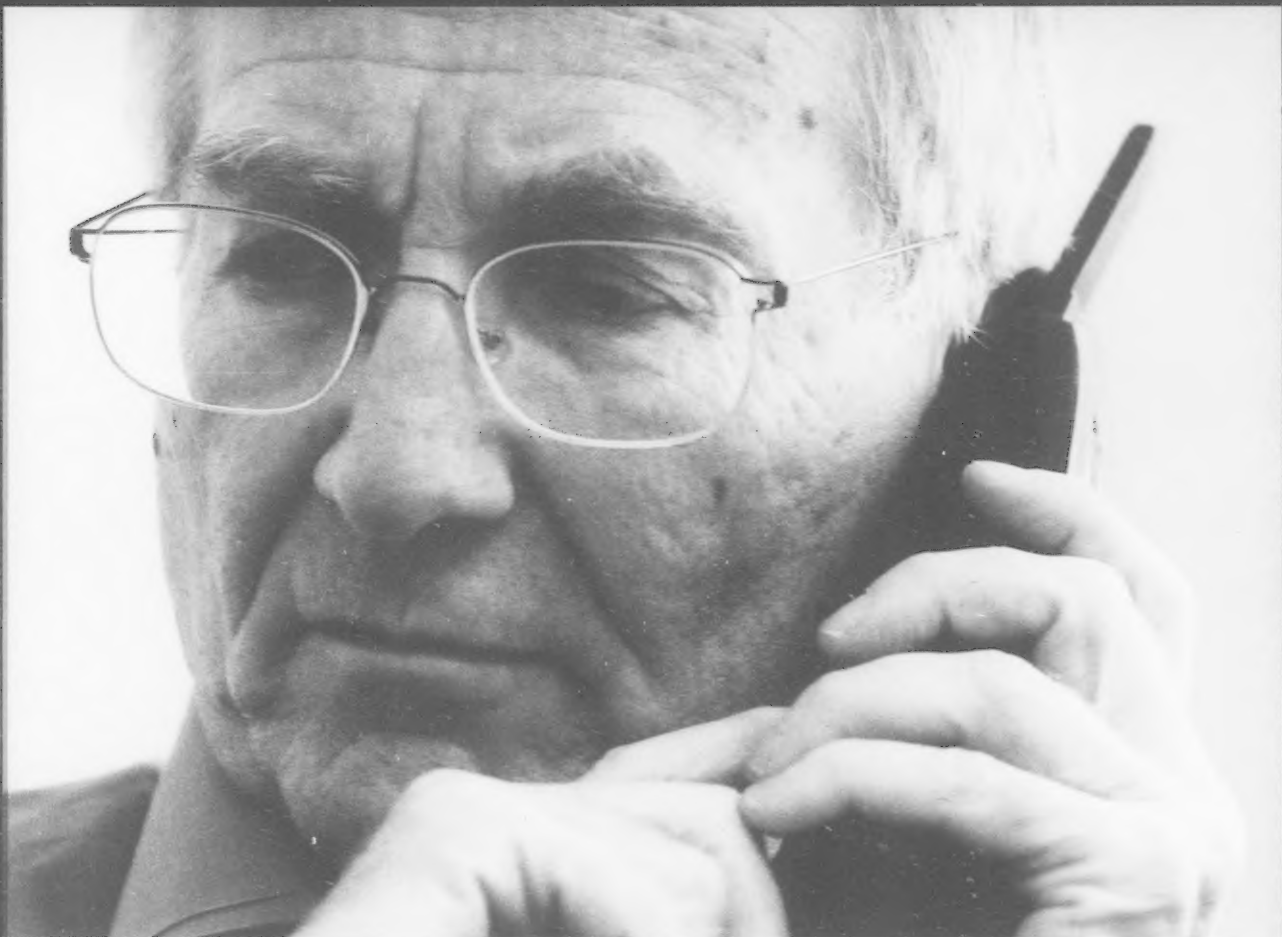
Wald: “Somewhere inside naval intelligence is my guess.”

Hersh: “Agency, too.”

Wald: “Okay . . .”

The atmosphere in the room is tense. Wald presses on, noting that Henry Kissinger had recently visited the class, and had complained bitterly about press leaks. “He cited in specific,” Wald notes





JENNIFER DOMENICK

crisply, "a reporter named Sy Hersh, who, he said, had damaged the United States by revealing military secrets."

Since the early 1970s, Hersh has been Kissinger's most indefatigable critic, so Wald is, in effect, tossing raw meat at his guest. Hersh's foot starts to tap the floor. When he unleashes his response, his voice is full of sarcasm and fury: "When I joined the *New York Times* Washington bureau in May of '72, there would be a reverential hush at five o'clock because Henry would call Max" — Frankel, the bureau chief — "to give him that day's feed, and then he would call Bernie Gwertzman, the foreign-affairs guy, and between those two calls we would have our lead story in the paper. And after watching this, sort of as an innocent, for a few weeks, I said to Gwertzman one day, 'Do you ever ask anybody else?' He said, 'Oh, no, the understanding with Henry is that if we did that he wouldn't talk.' So much for secrets."

The performance was vintage Hersh: another morning's work for a man who seems most content when he's exhaling fire, revealing what he considers to be the secrets behind the secrets, and rousing the ire of his targets. (In this case, Ford strenu-

ously denied he was ever in the Central Intelligence Agency; Hersh later conceded that he had confused Ford with someone else with a similar name. "I was dead wrong," he says. Frankel, meanwhile, insists that the charge that he took direction from Kissinger is "total nonsense.")

Hersh has been making waves since the late 1960s, when he achieved fame for uncovering one of the worst atrocities of the Vietnam War, the My Lai massacre. Since then, he has tackled a wide array of subjects: Watergate, CIA domestic spying, the 1973 coup in Chile, Israeli nuclear policy, the destruction of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, the India-Pakistan conflict, Mobil Oil company's activities in Kazakhstan, and new developments in cryptography. "He's the best investigative reporter," says his friend Leslie Gelb, a former *New York Times* reporter and columnist. "I don't think anybody touches him." "He has to be the great reporter of his generation," says Richard Reeves. "He has simply gotten stories no one else could. He's the real thing, a legend — and deserves to be."

But it hasn't been a smooth road to the

top. Hersh's career has been cyclical, with plenty of rough spots. In 1979 he left *The New York Times* under controversial circumstances, and his career floundered in the 1980s. To his evident frustration, he has never achieved the financial success of his rival, Bob Woodward. The low point of Hersh's career came in 1997 with the publication of his book about John F. Kennedy, *The Dark Side of Camelot*. The attacks on him began even before the book appeared, and the reviews were lethal: "It is an astonishing spectacle, this book," Garry Wills, himself the author of a critical book on the Kennedys, wrote in *The New York Review of Books*. "In his mad zeal to destroy Camelot . . . Hersh has with precision and method disassembled and obliterated his own career and reputation."

As it turns out, Wills's verdict was premature. Since September 11, 2001, Hersh, writing exclusively for *The New Yorker*, has produced an impressive body of work on intelligence failures, Middle Eastern politics, and our post-9/11 world order. These pieces have refocused public attention on Hersh, and, to a certain extent, on *The New Yorker* itself.



JENNIFER DOMINICK

Some of his reporting has drawn fire from the highest level of the U.S. government. In November 2001 Hersh reported that an elite Pentagon undercover unit — trained to disarm nuclear weapons — had explored plans for a mission inside Pakistan. When General Pervez Musharaff, Pakistan's leader, asked George W. Bush about Hersh's report, the president, according to Bob Woodward's book, *Bush at War*, replied thusly: "Seymour Hersh is a liar."

These days, questions about Hersh come from a number of directions. Some of his friends and admirers express a sense of uneasiness about the heavy reliance on unnamed sources in his reporting since 9/11, about the ephemeral nature of some of the pieces, and about his sometimes hawkish tone. Hersh has always been a man of the left, but he acknowledged to Michael Massing in *The Nation* in December 2001 that September 11 had affected his views: "It's a tough world. You have to rely on unsavory people." If your own child were involved, he said, by way of example, "you want Oliver North working on it."

Others insist that Hersh's work is loaded with false predictions. At various moments since 9/11, Jack Shafer recently proclaimed in *Slate*, "Hersh's predictive take on the course of events has been wrong. Boneheaded-dumb wrong." Perhaps Shafer is sounding an old refrain; critics have often accused Hersh of being wrong. In 1969, when he published his first revelations about My Lai, he got a call from a reporter at *The Washington Post*, who said to him: "You son of a bitch, where do you get off writ-

ing a lie like that?" In the 1960s and early 1970s, his intrepid reporting, combined with his gadfly aura, made him a hero to many of his colleagues. But journalism has changed, and so has Hersh. To what extent is he the same man — and the same journalist — he was then?

**S**eymour Hersh works out of an austere two-room suite on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, a few blocks from Dupont Circle, in a building full of middle-class professionals. His name does not appear on the lobby registry, and there is no nameplate on the door, though his telephone number is listed in the phone book. The office, littered with cardboard boxes, is filled with Nixon memorabilia. Hanging on a wall in a picture frame are the original black-and-white police mugshots of four Nixon-era villains: H.R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman, Charles Colson, and John Mitchell, ancient souvenirs passed along to Hersh by a friend in the Justice Department.

On another wall is a typed memo from Lawrence S. Eagleburger and Robert J. McCloskey to their superior, Henry Kissinger, then secretary of state. The memo is dated September 24, 1974. It reads: "We believe Seymour Hersh intends to publish further allegations on the CIA in Chile. He will *not* put an end to this campaign. You are his ultimate target . . ."

Hersh goes to his desk. "Thank God, only four messages!" One of them is from his son, who cries out plaintively: "Dad, put money in my account!"

Hersh opens his checkbook and quickly flees to the bank. His desk is a chaotic jumble of books, journals, miscellaneous documents, and baby pictures of his three children. There is the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*; there are books with titles like *Sharp Corners: Urban Operations at Century's End* and *Dezinformatia: The Strategy of Soviet Disinformation*; and there are reports entitled *1991 Cryptography and Privacy Conference*. There is a Rolodex, but he says he doesn't use it. Instead, he scribbles the phone numbers of his sources on the back of yellow legal pads, twenty or thirty numbers per pad, which he keeps in a heap under his desk, near his feet.

Seymour Hersh is a very difficult man, as prickly as a porcupine. When I first contacted him, his response was unequivocal: "Leave me alone!" When I phoned him to discuss the logistics of a trip to Washington, Hersh erupted, shouting into the phone, "What do you want to ask me! What do you want to ask me!" "He has no idea of social behavior," says a close friend and former colleague at the *Times*, Gloria Emerson. "At a private occasion, when he's making conversation with someone he's just met, Sy's idea of friendly behavior is to interrogate them. A grilling!"

Hersh returns from the bank. His shoelaces are untied. His mood has improved: he's closing a piece for *The New Yorker* and he exudes the quiet satisfaction of a man pleased with what he's written. While he takes calls from fact-checkers and editors, he allows me to linger in his outer office. My assignment is to read through several bulging folders of rotting clips from *The New York Times*, stories he wrote for the newspaper between 1972 and 1974 — a fruitful period for Hersh, when his work seemed permanently affixed to the front page. Hersh is justifiably proud of these Watergate-era pieces, and he wants the world to remember them.

The phone keeps ringing. Hersh, the great *Times* reporter Harrison Salisbury once observed, is a man who "seemed to have been born with a receiver at his ear." Watching him work the phones is, indeed, a remarkable experience. "I got your e-mail on Niger," he tells one caller. "I'm doing a story on it." He dismisses him with a very abrupt goodbye — a Hersh trademark. A few minutes later he makes a call, and his brusque demeanor has vanished: his tone is jaunty, upbeat, seductive. He leaves the following message: "Hi, it's Sy Hersh, I'm just checking

in. Call me. Let's talk." Who was that? A government official whom Hersh declined to identify.

The phone rings again. He picks it up and listens for a while. There is weariness in his reply. "Let someone else write that shit," he informs his caller. "I don't write that shit. It's just not my cup of tea." With his staccato phrasing and his rapid-fire delivery, he sounds like Walter Winchell: "My free advice: it's garbage." He dismisses the caller without rancor, signaling in a phrase that, despite this particular transgression, their business relationship remains intact: "Keep your ear to the ground." Whom was he talking to? "Oh, just somebody calling me." Who was it? Hersh replies, mischievously, "Somebody I've known for thirty years who used to work in the CIA, giving me a tip."

Seymour Myron Hersh was born in Chicago in 1937. His parents, who emigrated to the U.S. from Lithuania and Poland, spoke Yiddish and ran a dry-cleaning shop in a tough section of the city's South Side. Hersh, however, was raised in a more genteel section near Hyde Park. He has a fraternal twin, Alan, a physicist who lives on the West Coast. In high school his main passion was baseball, but also reading: he devoured novels by J.D. Salinger, John O'Hara, and John Steinbeck. It was the mid-1950s, but the rebellious spirit of the 1960s was already in the air: Hersh smoked his first "reefer" in 1955 and, around that time, saw Lenny Bruce perform at the famous Chicago club Mr. Kelly's.

By his own admission, Hersh was a lackluster student at the University of Chicago, where he majored in history, but spent much of his time playing bridge, doing the *New York Times* crossword puzzle, and drinking in after-hours bars. He had trouble finding a job after he graduated, and for a while worked for \$1.50 an hour at a Walgreens drug store. He was admitted to the University of Chicago Law School, but was expelled for poor grades. So he went back to Walgreens until he landed a job at the City News Bureau. Hersh's first assignment was to cover an electrical fire in a manhole.

At the bureau, he soon realized there was more to life than bridge and crossword puzzles. One day he was sent to a crime scene on the South Side; a man had shot five members of his family and then killed himself. Hersh saw the bodies and quickly called his office, shouting "Bulletin!" He started to dictate the details to the rewrite man, at which point an editor

*Seymour Hersh is a very difficult man, as prickly as a porcupine. When I first contacted him, his response was unequivocal: 'Leave me alone!' When I phoned him to discuss the logistics of a trip to Washington, Hersh erupted, shouting into the phone, 'What do you want to ask me! What do you want to ask me!'*

got on the phone. In a long, two-part interview with *Rolling Stone*, conducted by Joe Eszterhas in 1975, Hersh recalled:

He said: "Ah, my good dear energetic Mr. Hersh. Pardon me for interrupting but these, alas, poor unfortunate victims, do they happen to be of the American Negro persuasion?" And I said yes. "Will you please then cheap it out?" Which meant one paragraph. You learn a lot about the newspaper business that way. It wasn't a story because they were black.

After a brief stint running a suburban newspaper in Chicago, Hersh landed in 1962 at United Press International, which sent him to Pierre, South Dakota, where he covered the legislature, chronicled the Oglala Sioux, and continued to read heavily on the side: Carl Sandburg on Lincoln, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. on Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was also devouring *Harper's Magazine*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Republic*, and *The New York Times*, especially the Vietnam War reporting of David Halberstam. In 1963 Hersh bolted UPI for The Associated Press, and two years later the AP sent him to Washington, where he met the legendary muckraker I.F. Stone, whose famous, uncompromising newsletter, *I.F. Stone's Weekly*, influenced Hersh's reporting. (Many years later, when Stone was an old man and researching a book on Socrates, he would occasionally stop by Hersh's office and they would take strolls together.)

His beat in Washington was the Pentagon, where the press briefings were highly regimented. In his 1976 book, *The New Muckrakers*, Leonard Downie, Jr. noted that Hersh "soon made a habit of walking out in the middle of unproductive sessions and going instead to high-ranking officers in their lunch rooms, to question them, informally and uninvited, on subjects the briefing officers dodged."

Hersh began to outgrow the strictures of reporting for the AP during the cold war. In 1967 he was transferred to the wire service's special investigative unit,

where his editors watered down the lead of a major piece on the U.S. government's development of biological and chemical weapons. Hersh was outraged. He sold the story to *The New Republic*, jettisoned the AP, and signed on as press secretary to the insurgent presidential campaign of Eugene McCarthy. Three months later he quit and returned to the journalistic trenches: the Vietnam War was raging, and great stories were out there waiting to be nailed down.

**O**n March 16, 1968, at 7:30 A.M., one hundred soldiers from the U.S. Army's 11th Infantry Brigade descended on My Lai, a village on the northeastern coast of South Vietnam. The soldiers were searching for Vietcong fighters, but instead they found hundreds of women, children, and elderly men — many of whom were having breakfast outdoors when the troops arrived. Over the next few hours, at least 350 civilians were systematically slaughtered. Some were shot in their homes; others were machine-gunned from helicopters; still others were cut down in ditches. Women were raped and killed. "A Nazi-type thing," was how one American soldier later described it. By 9:30 A.M., the violence had ebbed. By 10:30 A.M., the hamlet was in flames.

More than a year later, in the fall of 1969, Hersh received a tip from Geoffrey Cowan, then a columnist for *The Village Voice*, that one of the platoon leaders — a young man named William L. Calley, Jr. — was about to be court-martialed for killing civilians in Vietnam. Hersh called a friend, a retired U.S. Army colonel. "What did this guy Calley do?" Hersh asked him. "This Calley is just a madman, Sy," he replied, "just a madman! He just went around killing all those people. Little babies!" Armed with a small grant from The Fund for Investigative Journalism and an American Ex-



Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr. in 1971 during his court-martial at Fort Benning, Georgia, for the My Lai massacre of civilians

*Hersh nearly gave up. Sheer willpower finally brought him face to face with Calley. 'Let's go talk,' Hersh told him. 'I know the story.'*

press card, Hersh flew to Salt Lake City, where he interviewed Calley's lawyer, and then to Fort Benning, Georgia, where Calley — a former dishwasher, bellhop, and railroad switchman — was stationed. As Hersh described it to *Rolling Stone* in the Eszterhas interview, he arrived at the base by 8:30 A.M., dressed in a suit and carrying a briefcase; he wanted to look like a lawyer or some official visitor. For the next fifteen hours, Hersh drove frantically around the labyrinthine base, dodging military officials left and right, and pumping scores of soldiers for information on Calley's whereabouts. He nearly gave up. Sheer willpower finally brought him face to face with Calley. "Let's go talk," Hersh told him. "I know the story."

They picked up steak and booze and went to Calley's girlfriend's house. "It was silly of him to speak with me," Hersh says. "But he just wanted to talk. He went all night." Hersh wrote the story on the plane back to Washington and offered it to various magazines, which turned it down. He then went to his neighbor, David Obst, who ran the tiny, left-wing Dispatch News Service, which marketed the work of free-lance writers, and asked him to syndicate it. Thirty-six newspapers (each paying \$100) ran the story, which triggered a firestorm.

Over the next few months, Hersh, flying around the country, interviewed many of the young soldiers who were at My Lai, and he connected all the dots in his book, *My Lai 4*, which Random House published in 1970, and which stands as one of the essential books on the Vietnam War. Written in a careful, reportorial style, *My Lai 4* is not merely a meticulous reconstruction of a single massacre, but a powerful account of the madness unleashed by U.S. intervention in Vietnam. The text is filled with chilling asides: Hersh noted that one highly touted colonel — George S. Patton III, the son of the famous general — "celebrated Christmas in 1968 by sending cards reading: 'From Colonel and Mrs. George S. Patton III — Peace on Earth.' Attached to the cards were color photographs of dismembered Viet Cong soldiers stacked in a neat pile."

In 1970 Hersh received the Pulitzer Prize for the My Lai story, and he achieved considerable renown in antiwar circles. "I'm a fucking celebrity!" Hersh boasted to a journalist at the time. Yet he stayed on the My Lai story. When the military launched its own investigation into the massacre, a sympathetic insider passed along to Hersh forty volumes of top-secret official testimony, a trove of documents that formed the core of his 1972 book, *Cover-Up*, which originally appeared in William Shawn's *New Yorker*. My Lai is a story that remains close to Hersh's heart. Three years ago, he spoke at an anniversary event for *Harper's Magazine*, which published some of the reporting in 1970. When he read from his old piece, his voice broke. "I was asked to read it by Rick MacArthur," the magazine's publisher, Hersh says. "And I told him I couldn't read it without crying. It was just too devastating."

**W**hen Hersh joined *The New York Times* in 1972, the newspaper was not known for its muckraking. But the insurrectionary energies of the 1960s had changed journalism as well as politics, and the old rules no longer applied. Hiring Sy Hersh was the *Times's* strategy for catching up with *The Washington Post* on Watergate.

"Until Seymour Hersh entered Watergate," Philip Nobile would write in *Esquire*, "the *Times* was a pitiful, helpless giant rooting up dried tubers." When he did finally enter the fray, in November 1972, Hersh performed brilliantly. This was his most remarkable period as a newspaper reporter — a period of stress and productivity that led to rashes and dandruff, but also to key scoops. But the competition was formidable. "He would never entirely catch up with Woodward and Bernstein," David Halberstam wrote in *The Powers That Be*, "for they were too far out in front, they had locked up some remarkable sources and their work habits were relentless and there were two of them and only one of him."

It was during Watergate, Downie wrote in *The New Muckrakers*, that "Hersh and Woodward . . . became particularly fascinated with each other." Hersh resented the way he was portrayed in the book *All The President's Men* — "horn-rimmed and somewhat pudgy . . . in old tennis shoes, a frayed pinstripe shirt that might have been his best in his college freshmen year . . ." — and he also envied the success of the book and the film. Downie paid a visit to Hersh in late 1974, and Hersh fished out *The New York Times Book Review*. He pointed to the best-seller list, at the top of which sat *All The President's Men*. "It's still number one," Hersh complained to Downie. "I keep thinking of all the money Woodward and Bernstein got. But then that's what helped to create the mystique about investigative reporting. I can't really complain. It's put money in my pocket, too." "I wouldn't mind making a million dollars on a book," Hersh confessed to *Rolling Stone*. "Having Robert Redford play me wouldn't bother me at all."

In those years, much attention was focused on Hersh's personality and reporting techniques. One of his editors at the Washington bureau, Robert Phelps, recently recalled, with wry disbelief, the kinds of messages that Hersh would leave. "He would call people and he'd say 'I'm Seymour Hersh, I'm doing a story on this

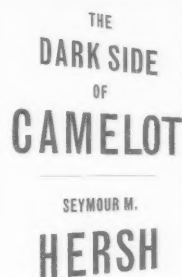
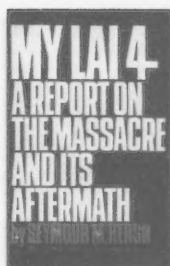


... If he doesn't call me, I will get his ass.' They'd call back."

Hersh has difficult relationships with nearly all his editors; A.M. Rosenthal of the *Times* was no exception. In their first phone conversation, Hersh hung up on him. Rosenthal enjoyed patting Hersh on the shoulder and saying, "Well, well, how's my little commie today?" But they needed each other: the editor wanted first-rate stories and the reporter churned them out with regularity. In the fall of 1974, Hersh took Rosenthal to meet the CIA director, William Colby. At one point, Hersh recalls, Rosenthal lost his temper and burst out: "How come every time I come across the CIA I find they are on the side of the fingernail pullers?" Colby replied that the CIA's job was not to make policy, but to follow the orders of the president. "When we got outside, in the parking lot," Hersh recalls, "Abe grabbed me and said, 'You just keep on going on these guys. That's what Eichmann said.'"

With Rosenthal's blessings, Hersh reported extensively on the CIA's clandestine operations in Chile, and, more explosively, about the CIA's domestic spying within the United States. Hersh's red-hot story of December 22, 1974 — headlined **HUGE CIA OPERATION REPORTED IN U.S. AGAINST ANTI-WAR FORCES, OTHER DISSIDENTS IN NIXON YEARS** — generated shock waves and led directly to the formation of the Rockefeller Commission and the Senate select committee headed by Frank Church, which investigated the CIA's covert operations.

In 1975 Hersh moved to New York, where his wife was attending medical school. It was there that he turned his full attention to corporate chicanery, a long-standing interest that was much remarked upon by his colleagues. Hersh "is an old-line radical in a way," Woodward told Downie for *The New Muckrakers*. "He is interested more in the abuse of really big power, concentrated power, in the military and international capitalism." In 1977 Hersh, assisted by Jeff Gerth, produced a hard-hitting three-part investigation into Gulf & Western Industries, one



of the country's largest conglomerates. Hersh's accusations of financial impropriety were hotly contested by G&W executives, some of whom, according to *Vanity Fair* and Hersh himself, tape-recorded Hersh's caustic interviews with G&W employees, and turned the tapes over to *Times* management. (Hersh reportedly said, "You better see me. Otherwise, you are going to jail with the others"; "G&W is a piece of shit — garbage"; etc.)

Hersh would later suggest that the *Times* was ambivalent about his brand of corporate muckraking. The *Times*, he told Joseph Goulden, author of *Fit to Print: A.M. Rosenthal and His Times*, "wasn't nearly as happy when we went after business wrongdoing as when we were kicking around some slob in government." Leslie Gelb says, carefully, "I never asked Abe or the others about this, but I think that they felt he hadn't nailed down the story of Gulf & Western as far as he had nailed down a lot of his other stories. That was the nub of it, rather than Gulf & Western being some important client of the *Times*."

A.M. Rosenthal declined to speak with *CJR*. But it appears that he had growing doubts about Hersh in the late 1970s. Rosenthal described to Goulden an occasion in which he saw Hersh working the telephone. Rosenthal was quoted as follows: "He was practically blackmailing this guy. He was saying, 'Either you tell me what I want to know or I'll . . . I put my hands over my ears and ran out of the room. I didn't want to hear this sort of thing. I didn't want any part of it.'"

Hersh is not eager to revisit the Gulf & Western episode or the circumstances of his departure from the *Times*. "It was time to move on," he says. Leslie Gelb affirms, "The *Times* changed, not Sy Hersh." He would later return to the *Times* for special projects. But in 1979 he left the paper to write his scathing book on Henry Kissinger, *The Price of Power*, a book he had been composing in his head since 1973, when he boasted to Woodward and Bernstein over Chinese food, "I'd really love to get that son-of-a-bitch, too. I know him from way before Watergate. But he'll get no cheap shots from

me; either I get him hard, with facts, solid information, evidence, the truth, or I don't touch him."

**P**ublished in 1983, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, resulted from four years of obsessive labor and more than one thousand interviews. Those with misgivings about the book tend to take issue with its prosecutorial tone and literary shortcomings, not its substance: "Everything was unveiled with the same emotional tone," says the writer Thomas Powers. "What Kissinger had for breakfast along with the bombing of Cambodia."

The book — which contained devastating chapters on Vietnam, Cambodia, Chile, the India-Pakistan war, wiretapping, and the White House Plumbers, not to mention passages that lacerated his former *Times* colleagues like Max Frankel and James Reston for their proximity to Kissinger — invented the field of Kissinger studies, and others who have written about Kissinger (Walter Isaacson, Christopher Hitchens) have done so in Hersh's shadow. *The Price of Power* is Hersh's best book, and it has stood the test of time. "There is more solid history in that book than any book I know of on that era," says Daniel Ellsberg, the man who gave the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times*. Leslie Gelb says: "It looks like over time it has held up."

*The Price of Power* was also a book that brought Hersh face to face with his own past. In revisiting the Nixon era, he had to confront some errors in his own reporting from the early 1970s: mainly his mistreatment of Edward M. Korry, the U.S. ambassador to Chile from 1967 to 1971. In late 1974 Hersh, relying on leaks from a Senate subcommittee, reported in the *Times* that Korry had known about the CIA's efforts to foment a coup against Chile's elected president, Salvador Allende. Korry responded with fury to Hersh's reporting, insisting that he knew nothing about the CIA's efforts. Only one reporter, Joe Trento of the Wilmington, Delaware *News Journal*, bothered to investigate Korry's version. Trento, in the middle of his reporting, got a call from Hersh, who sneered: "You have no business reporting on this story. You should turn your sources over to me . . . I work for the *New York Times*, this is our story."

In 1979, when Hersh began to reconstruct Kissinger's activities on Chile, he apparently realized he needed Korry's assistance. Korry's old friend Richard

## MANHUNT

The Bush Administration's war strategy in the war against terrorism.

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

Sometime in January, November 1st, the Bush Administration's war strategy in the war against terrorism. Seymour M. Hersh, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, is the author of *The War in the Desert*, a book about the 1990-1991 Gulf War. He is also the author of *The Red Pill*, a book about the 1979-1980 Iranian Revolution. He is currently working on a book about the 2001-2002 invasion of Afghanistan.

ANNALS OF NATIONAL SECURITY

## LUNCH WITH THE CHAIRMAN

Why was Richard Perle meeting with Adnan Khashoggi?

BY SEYMOUR M. HERSH

At the peak of his deal-making activities, in the nineteen-seventies, the Saudi-born businessman Adnan Khashoggi brokered billions of dollars in arms and aircraft sales for the Saudi royal family, earning hundreds of millions in commissions and fees. Though never convicted of wrongdoing, he was repeatedly involved in disputes with federal prosecutors and with the Securities and Exchange Commission, and in recent years he has been in litigation in Thailand and Los Angeles, among other places, concerning allegations of stock fraud, manipulation and fraud. During the Reagan Administration, Khashoggi was one of the middlemen between Oliver North, the White House, and the

former government officials, retired military officers, and academics. Its members, who serve without pay, include former national security advisers, Secretaries of Defense, and heads of the CIA. The board meets several times a year at the Pentagon to review and assess the country's strategic defense policies.

Perle is also a managing partner in a venture-capital company called Trivium Partners L.P., which was registered in November, 2001, in Delaware. Trivium's main business, according to a two-page letter that one of its representatives sent to Khashoggi last November, is to invest in companies dealing in technology, goods, and services that are of value to

book, *The Pinochet File*, based on declassified documents. "Korry, actually, was cut out of the loop."

By the early 1980s, thanks to his reporting on Vietnam and Watergate, Hersh had developed a vast number of

sources — many of them mid-level bureaucrats — in places like the CIA, the National Security Agency and the State Department. He got into the habit of scanning the various departmental newsletters, looking for retirement notices and independent-minded employees. "He's very methodical in terms of exploiting sources," says Richard J. Kerr, a former deputy director of the CIA. "He'll contact an awful lot of people." When Kerr retired in 1992, Hersh invited him to lunch to discuss the ways in which Pakistan, with the acquiescence of the Reagan and Bush administrations, acquired a nuclear arsenal with material purchased in the U.S. The result was a pathbreaking — and prescient — *New Yorker* piece that appeared in 1993.

"I don't go around getting my stories from nice old Lefties or the Weathermen or the America-with-a-k boys," he told *Rolling Stone* in 1975. "I get them from good old-fashioned constitutionalists. I learned a long time ago that you can't go around making judgments on the basis of people's politics. The essential thing is: Do they have integrity or not?"

Hersh spent much of the 1980s writing two critically acclaimed but commercially unsuccessful books. *The Target Is Destroyed* (1986) concerned the destruction of Korean Air Lines Flight 007, and the Reagan administration's abuse of the communications intelligence. *The Samson Option* (1991) chronicled the process by which Israel obtained a nuclear arse-

*'I know every single source that is in his pieces,' Remnick says. 'To every "retired intelligence officer," every general with reason to know, and all those phrases that one has to use, alas, by necessity, I say, "Who is it? What's his interest?" We talk it through.'*

nal. Both books sold poorly at a time when Hersh's rival, Woodward, was churning out a steady stream of best-sellers. Hersh, in the early 1990s, apparently felt it was time to cash in. By 1996 he and a one-time co-author received a reported \$800,000 advance for a book on John Kennedy. "I started the book on Kennedy," he told a group of Nieman fellows in 1998, "for a couple of reasons. One, I had a publisher who was going to give me a lot of money to do it. That's very important, you know, these days."

Early in his research, Hersh came across an astonishing trove of handwritten documents about JFK — showing, for instance, that the president allegedly had paid hush money to Marilyn Monroe. But the people peddling the documents were charlatans, and most of the papers themselves were forgeries. Some of his peers tried to warn him. At one point Hersh called a Kennedy biographer, Richard Reeves for assistance. "When he said," Reeves recalls, "that he had a 'contract between JFK and Marilyn Monroe,' I said that could not possibly be authentic, that whatever actually went on in those days, JFK was far too cautious (and sensible) to ever sign something like that. And I never heard from him again."

Hersh removed the documents from the book shortly before it went to press, but the news media pounced on his credulity. A long article about the controversy in *The Washington Post* began: "The strange and twisted saga of the JFK file is part cautionary tale, part slapstick farce, a story of deception and self-delusion in the service of commerce and journalism."

By and large, *The Dark Side of Camelot* was savaged by reviewers, and much attention was paid to the book's salacious details about JFK's sexual appetite — details that Hersh obtained from interviews with members of JFK's Secret Service team. People close to Hersh insist that he has a puritanical streak, and that those sentiments burst forth in the Kennedy book. "Sy is a very

bad judge of other men's behavior," a close friend says. "He has led a very decorous life in a certain way. I was against the book from the beginning because he was so *shocked* by what Jack had done. Another man would not have been quite so shocked."

Hersh himself now expresses misgivings about the material he obtained from the Secret Service agents. "Am I ambivalent about it? Yeah. I wish they hadn't spoken on the record. I wouldn't have used it."

*Dark Side's* critics allege errors in the book that go beyond sex. Max Holland, a *Nation* contributing editor who is writing a history of the Warren Commission, notes that the final report of the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB) — which was created in response to Oliver Stone's film, *JFK* — invalidates some of Hersh's key revelations. Hersh, for instance, wrote that JFK used Judith Campbell Exner as a courier to deliver cash to the mobster Sam Giancana; his source was a political operative named Martin Underwood, who told a believing Hersh that he followed Exner on a train from Washington to Chicago, and watched her hand over the satchel. But Holland notes that "when sitting across from a government lawyer instead of a reporter," Underwood recanted his story. In the final ARRB report, published a year after Hersh's book appeared, the following statement appears: "Underwood denied that he followed Judith Campbell Exner on a train."

To a certain extent, *The Dark Side of Camelot* damaged Hersh's standing among colleagues. "I don't read him anymore because I don't trust him," says Holland. "I find Hersh a perplexing character," says *Newsweek's* Evan Thomas, who has written extensively about the Kennedys. "He's done great work, but he wildly overreached with the Kennedy book." These days, Thomas reads Hersh differently. "I read what he writes with some skepticism or doubt or uncertainty."

Shortly after the attacks of September 11, David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, sat down and studied the magazine's coverage of Pearl Harbor, and determined that the editors had been slow to react to that momentous event. Remnick wanted to avoid that mistake in late 2001; he wanted a faster, news-driven magazine. As part of that effort, Hersh began to produce shorter pieces on tighter deadlines. That was a significant departure from the

work he did for Tina Brown, who edited *The New Yorker* from 1992 to 1998, and for Remnick until late 2001.

Some of Hersh's pieces before 9/11 were remarkable. In 2000 he produced an obsessive, 25,000-word article that showed, in painstaking, chilling detail, how soldiers under the command of General Barry McCaffrey massacred scores of Iraqi troops in the final days of the 1991 gulf war. Hersh had backed into the story accidentally: while investigating McCaffrey's role in the Colombian drug war, a retired four-star officer barked at him for focusing on the general's deeds in South America instead of Iraq. "Are you crazy?" the officer said. "Go get him for what he did." Hersh performed six months of research, and spoke with three hundred people — including young soldiers who witnessed the killings. (One of Hersh's key sources lived in rural Missouri, in a house without a phone; Hersh made several trips to the region, and found him on the third try.) Hersh thinks his story was underappreciated: "Not one book offer," he grumbles, "not one prize . . ."

In July 2001, again in *The New Yorker*, Hersh published a lengthy investigation into Mobil Oil's activities in Kazakhstan, a piece that illuminated a shadowy netherworld of confidence men, oil barons, and crooked politicians. Owing to the complexity of the material, the Mobil article lacked the color and narrative momentum of the McCaffrey piece, but its repercussions were greater. Last April the government indicted two of the major figures in Hersh's story, who were accused of accepting bribes and kickbacks related to the oil transactions. The indictment itself bears a stunning resemblance to Hersh's *New Yorker* story.

It is too early for a definitive assessment of Hersh's work since 9/11, but it's clear that much of it has been superb. In the confused, difficult months after the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, Hersh's reporting had a clarifying effect on a wide range of issues: on the intelligence failures surrounding 9/11; on the ineptitude and decadence of the Saudi royal family; on the instability of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal; on the shortcomings of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan.

Month after month, Hersh kept up his pace. In the second half of 2002, he detailed the flawed legal case against Zacarias Moussaoui, and exposed the Bush administration's efforts to target and assassinate suspected al-Qaeda

members. Hersh's March 17, 2003, article on Richard Perle's business dealings was a direct hit, and led to Perle's speedy resignation as head of the Defense Policy Board. When the Bush administration insisted, earlier this year, that Iraq had received nuclear materials from Niger — a claim that found its way into the State of the Union address — the press, by and large, let the claim stand. Hersh, building on foreign press accounts, debunked the story. And Hersh was among the first to shed light on the Pentagon's Office of Special Plans, which provided key — and perhaps dubious — intelligence to the White House on Iraq's weapons capability.

Tina Brown used Hersh as a magazine writer: long deadlines resulted in long pieces with a long shelf life; Remnick followed that model until 9/11, at which point he started to use Hersh more like a newspaperman. It was a wise decision in many respects, but a price has been paid: there is a certain perishability to some of Hersh's recent output. On April 7, for example, when the U.S. military was temporarily bogged down in southern Iraq, Hersh rushed into print with an article that accused Donald Rumsfeld of micro-managing (and mismanaging) the war plan. When Iraqi resistance crumbled, Hersh's article was obsolete. Over the last two months, I asked dozens of Hersh-watchers to reflect on the fifteen articles he has published in *The New Yorker* since 9/11. Most were unable to recall more than two or three of them. Some of his colleagues believe that for a variety of reasons, he's not punching as hard as usual these days. "He'd like to be a bomb thrower," says Walter Pincus, who covers intelligence for *The Washington Post*, "but I think he's throwing darts. They sting, but there's no real lasting effect."

Some critics have detected a hawkish streak in Hersh's recent reporting. In his first *New Yorker* piece after 9/11, Hersh complained that since 1991, "the CIA has become increasingly bureaucratic and unwilling to take risks." He also lamented the fact that, after a 1995 scandal involving a CIA informant in Guatemala, "hundreds of 'assets' were indiscriminately stricken from the CIA's payroll, with a devastating effect on antiterrorist operations in the Middle East." Those statements raised eyebrows, especially in liberal quarters.



*In the confused, difficult months after the attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon, Hersh's reporting had a clarifying effect on a wide range of issues.*

"What's gotten into Sy Hersh?" Timothy Noah wondered in *Slate*. "Even though he probably didn't mean it that way, Hersh's . . . piece reads like a plea to make the CIA a rogue elephant once again." Michael Massing, in *The Nation*, wondered about Hersh's apparent "eagerness for the CIA's return to dirty work in dark alleys."

A few weeks ago, during lunch at a Washington steakhouse, I asked Hersh about those allegations. "The notion," he says, "that I would be interested in a CIA that can overthrow people willy-nilly is so preposterous that it's beyond belief." Hersh referred to a *New Yorker* article from 1999, in which he chronicled the conflict between the CIA and the UN-SCOM inspection team in Iraq. "If you read that piece," he says impatiently, "you see how *fucking incompetent* the agency is. They cared more about interfering with the UN than doing their own work. A lot of the rage that I share after 9/11 comes from the fact that they're not good. It doesn't come from the idea that I want them to go out and kill mothers." (Hersh insists he is no fan of Oliver North, and he regrets his remark to *The Nation*.)

Indeed, a striking feature of Hersh's work since the late 1990s is his open hostility to the CIA and the intelligence community. Thomas Powers recalls a conversation with Hersh before 9/11. "At one point he said to me, 'Listen, Tom, you gotta understand, this isn't the CIA that you used to know in Richard Helms's day. This place has been severely weakened. It's a lot of geriatric cases and timid careerists, and it's just a *completely different atmosphere*.'" And that view found its way into Hersh's reporting on the intelligence agencies. In late 1999 Hersh published a little-noticed piece in *The New Yorker* entitled "The Intelligence Gap: How the digital age left our spies out in the cold," which concluded that the National Security Agency had become a decaying, flat-footed bureaucracy, one unable to keep up with new developments in encryption and fiber optics. The NSA, Hersh reported, was unable to process the vast majority of information traffic that came under its purview. "If the agency,"

he wrote, "were able to filter through the traffic . . . international terrorists like Osama bin Laden would not be able to remain in hiding." It was an extraordinarily prescient piece of reporting.

From rogue elephant to flat-footed elephant: that appears to be the trajectory of the CIA in the latter half of Hersh's career. The young Sy Hersh thought the agency was doing too much; the older Sy Hersh believes it was doing too little. He was right with regard to the former; history could prove him correct with the latter. In both cases, his antennae were up; in both cases, he is ahead of the pack; in both cases, he followed the story.

"It's a mistake to look at Sy's work from an ideological perspective," says Mark Danner, a *New Yorker* staff writer. "What Sy wants to do is tell you what's really happening. If he has an ideology, it's the belief that the government should not be able to tell a story publicly that is really a contradiction of what's going on in reality. And he sees his job as closing the gap between the public version and real version." *Closing the gap* — it's a useful way to think about Hersh's work. And it's that aspect of Hersh's output, Danner notes, that distinguishes him from competitors like Bob Woodward. Says Danner: "In his recent work, Woodward, partly because he relies for his main sources on officials at the highest levels of government, tends to give you what at least claims to be the 'deeper' version of what is, essentially, the official story. Hersh, whose sources generally come from a lower-down, more 'operational' level of the bureaucracy, much more frequently gives you a version of events that the government does *not* want public — which is to say, a version that contradicts the official story of what went on."

Danner has a point, and yet Hersh's politics cannot be so easily disregarded. Much of his best work occurs when his moral outrage is fused with his investigative energies. His rage at injustice — and the perpetual loathing he feels for the likes of Henry Kissinger — are among the most arresting aspects of his character. And it's that rage that perme-

ates Hersh's recent speeches. In a September 2002 speech in Minneapolis, he expressed his deep admiration for Senator Paul Wellstone, and explained why the White House had been so relentlessly focused on Saddam Hussein: "They've got to keep us scared and they've got to keep us jacked up on Iraq," he said. "If we're not talking about Saddam, we're talking about Enron and Tyco. It's the best issue Bush has and he's playing it hard." In a March 11 speech at Harvard, Hersh lashed the administration in general and Attorney General John Ashcroft in particular: "He's the least knowledgeable and most dangerous attorney general we've had."

By and large, those kinds of jagged political sentiments do not appear in Remnick's *New Yorker*, and they also do not appear in Hersh's *New Yorker* pieces. Hersh's relationship with Remnick seems vaguely reminiscent of his relationship with Abe Rosenthal. Remnick needs the stories, Hersh needs the work, and those facts may paper over the political differences between them. But the differences do exist. In February Remnick wrote a signed "Talk of the Town" piece insisting that the United States had no choice but to go to war against Hussein's Iraq. The piece upset Hersh. Says Gloria Emerson: "He was very unhappy that David Remnick wrote that piece endorsing the war in Iraq and saying containment doesn't work. He called me and he was *very unhappy*."

Hersh's friends insist that he works most effectively under a strong editor, and he seems to have one in Remnick. "The combination of the *Times* and Sy was a terrific one because there is a lot of rigor in the review process at the *Times*," says Leslie Gelb. "I hear that Remnick has introduced a lot of that rigor and checking as well. If the story is right, that's a good combination. Sy needs it. It's the kind of impetus he needs to go back and check this and that."

"I know *every single source* that is in his pieces," Remnick says. To "every" retired intelligence officer, every general with reason to know, and all those phrases that one has to use, alas, by necessity, I say, "Who is it? What's his interest?" We talk it through." The tension between the two men can be acute — "David isn't always nice to me," sighs Hersh — but both parties are well served by it.

And yet it's a different relationship than the one Hersh had with Tina Brown, whose *New Yorker* was more congenial to Hersh's politics. He has



warm memories of Brown, who brought him back to the magazine in 1992: "She gave me a lot of money; she was amazing. She had an eye. She let me go." He used that freedom well. In late 1993 Hersh handed her one of his masterpieces — "A Case Not Closed," which debunked the so-called plot by Iraqi intelligence to assassinate George H.W. Bush in Kuwait. The piece was a pungent, sardonic, swashbuckling *tour de force*: Hersh enlisted experts to study the forensic evidence for the alleged plot and they determined that it was bogus. The piece that resulted expressed clear political sentiments (the gulf war was "brutal and disastrous"); excoriated the political opportunism of Bill Clinton and his top advisers, who ordered a missile attack against Baghdad in response to the so-called plot; and critically examined the coverage of the case in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Hersh seamlessly fused opinion and fact, irony and analysis in a way that connected all the dots — and, what's more, gave the piece a sprightliness and readability that is generally lacking in the recent work he's done for Remnick.

It appears that Remnick is not interested in Sy Hersh the press critic or Sy Hersh the political analyst. He wants straight, hard-nosed news reporting. Does *The New Yorker's* current editor believe that a strong point of view weakens Hersh's work? "In order to maximize the confidence of the reader," says Remnick, "I want those pieces to be as down the middle and as fair and as balanced as humanly possible."

Perhaps that explains the red-hot vehemence of Hersh's recent speeches. At the podium, he dissects the moral and political underpinnings of George W. Bush's war on terrorism. His post-9/11 *New Yorker* reporting, however, is more narrowly focused on questions of strategy and execution pertaining to the war. The rage and sarcasm are generally absent from the pieces; the tone of the writing is chillier and more detached; the articles are filled with consequential facts, but Hersh's fierce analytical powers are not always brought to bear on those facts. It's almost as if Tina Brown sent Hersh into battle with a bazooka, while Remnick armed him with a high-powered rifle. Hersh is still nailing his targets, but it's a question of degree. (When asked to reflect on the comparative freedom granted him by Brown and Remnick, Hersh is uncharacteristically reticent.) Hersh is cur-

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rently writing a book on the war on terrorism, and one suspects that it will eschew the Remnickian approach of balanced reporting in favor of the more analytical, opinionated prose he wrote for Tina Brown.

If you want to encounter Hersh in his natural element, the place to go is the daily nationally syndicated radio show *Democracy Now!*, where he is a frequent guest. The show is a low-budget, 1960s-style operation; the listeners tend to be passionate left-wing skeptics. The host is Amy Goodman, a relentless, old-fashioned muckraker of whom Hersh is extremely fond; he appreciated her bare-knuckled reporting on Bill Clinton, and the courage she displayed in East Timor in 1991, when she was nearly beaten to death while covering a massacre. Hersh is comfortable on the show: away from editors and fact-checkers, he says what's on his mind — at which point it becomes clear that he hasn't changed much since the 1960s. He remains the same man, and the same journalist; it is other things that have changed — including American television, which has room for punditry from Richard Perle

and General McCaffrey, but not, by and large, from Sy Hersh. So he talks to *Democracy Now!*'s small audience.

When Hersh spoke at Harvard in March, he said: "I have never seen my peers as frightened as they are now." In the middle of the Iraq war, Goodman asked him on the air what he meant by that remark. "I'm not wildly interested in self-immolation," he said, "so I'll just let my work stand for what I think about the press corps." But Hersh is a man who can't restrain his tongue, so he pressed on with an acidic commentary about the notorious March 6 White House press conference on the eve of Gulf War II, at which reporters hurled softball questions at Bush, and the president himself made a joke about how the list of people from whom he was calling questions had been scripted. Hersh compared the performance to a puppet show.

"It would have been very simple," Hersh said, "for one of the reporters to stand up and say, 'Thank you, Mr. President, but I want to give my question to Dana Milbank,'" the *Washington Post* correspondent whose skeptical reporting of the president has made him highly unpopular in the White House. "I think, within ten seconds, that would

have restored some dignity to the press corps and let the world see what was happening," he said. "I have to tell you, I did things like that when I covered the Pentagon for The Associated Press thirty-five years ago — that long ago, *my God*. We have every right as journalists to stand up for ourselves."

Goodman brought up Hersh's recent *New Yorker* piece on Rumsfeld's war plan, and asked him if, by focusing on the defense secretary, he was, in effect, letting George W. Bush off the hook. "You know, you just have to go piece by piece. We're talking about Rumsfeld in this article." He paused for a moment, for dramatic effect, and then replied mischievously, "I'm not done reporting," an implication that drew a low chuckle from Goodman. It's not an idle boast. If there is a smoking gun lying around the White House, the reporter most likely to find it is Seymour M. Hersh. Should he do so, perhaps Robert Redford can play him in the movie. ■

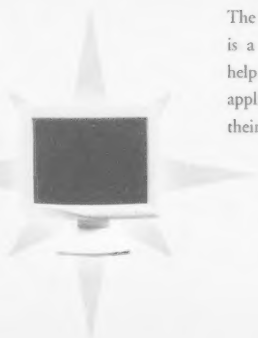
Scott Sherman is a contributing editor to *CJR*. His profile of Dean Singleton appeared in the March/April issue. Nicholas Engstrom contributed research to this article.

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READ ALL ABOUT IT: a newsstand near a sprawling Baghdad bazaar

BY BORZOU DARAGAH

**H**assan Hadi, a Muslim cleric and would-be director of television and radio for the Islamic Information Network, sat in his Baghdad office and fumed. It was late May, and six weeks earlier the U.S. military had freed Iraq of Saddam Hussein's tyranny, allowing Hadi to freely practice his Shiite faith, speak his mind, and even launch a newspaper called *Voice of Friday*. But now he railed against the Americans who had taken over the Iraqi capital's television and radio facilities and begun broadcasting.

A petition signed by former television employees authorized Hadi to speak in their name, and thus the Americans, he said, were defying the will of the Iraqi people. The Hawza, a famed Shiite seminary run by ayatollahs in the holy Iraqi city of Najaf, had granted Hadi authority over Baghdad's airwaves, and thus the Americans were also defying the will of God. "In America there is freedom of everything," says the white-turbaned cleric. "Press, food, drink, dancing, and even sex. The Iraqi people are a Muslim people, and such things are not acceptable here. The media is just like food. You have to clean it and make sure there's no poison before you distribute it."

Across town, behind razor-wire-shrouded checkpoints manned by peach-faced American soldiers, a group of Iraqi journalists and American advisers assembled news segments for the Iraqi Media Network (IMN), the U.S.-backed reincarnation of the country's hated — and now dissolved, bombed, looted, and torched — Ministry of Information. They have their own dream for the Iraqi media: a free-wheeling cross between the BBC and PBS. "The vision is to provide the Iraqi people with a European broadcasting system model," says

# Rebuilding Iraq's Media

*Saddam's fall unleashed a media free-for-all. Whoever prevails will have a lot to say about Iraq's future.*

Mike Furlong, a senior adviser to the U.S. media reconstruction effort.

IMN employees — many of whom are former low-level information ministry employees who now wear U.S. Defense Department badges — use the makeshift broadcast equipment in the dilapidated Baghdad Convention Center to put together reports about mass graves, freed prisoners, electricity shortages, and even a few stories critical of the pace and style of the American reconstruction effort.

Their boss in Baghdad, Ahmad al Rikabi, a thirty-three-year-old Iraqi who was raised in Sweden, says he's keen on teaching his employees the rules of balanced journalism. "Trying to create a free media based on the experience of the journalists in the last thirty years is almost impossible, so you have to change the mentality," says al Rikabi, a former London bureau chief of *Radio Free Iraq*. "We don't serve the government."

Time will tell whether the U.S. advisers — working with like-minded Iraqis — can create an Iraqi Jim Lehrer without provoking the country's traditionalists and Islamists. The Islamists, in turn, are joined in their battle for Iraq's airwaves by Iran's ubiquitous, anti-American television and radio broadcasts. The Iranian broadcasts — often the only television available to Iraqis — mix poetry, music, and language classes with news reports about the "Zionist entity" and experts urging Iraqis to ignore the U.S. and take control of the government.

What the Americans hope to create is unprecedented in authoritarian Arab countries like Iraq, says Massoud Derhally, an editor of *Arabian Business*, a Dubai-based monthly magazine. "In Arab countries, you have media that toe the line," he says. And it may also be unrealistic to expect the Iraqi media to be a carbon copy of the U.S. press. But in between the efforts of the Americans on one end of the scale and the Iranians on the other, a new and unexpected media force has emerged from the rubble of Iraq. By late May, nearly 100 new publications and a handful of broadcast out-



HASSAN HADI



ASHTAR ALI YASSERI

PHOTOS BY DAVID CROSS

lets were available in Baghdad, with others launching in major Iraqi cities such as Kirkuk, Mosul, and Basra. They are communist, monarchist, Kurdish, Assyrian, Islamist, nationalist, and secularist. Some are shrill and tawdry, like London tabloids. Others are staid and dry, like a New York broadsheet. But they are Iraqi.

And what their editors and reporters say about their visions for a post-Saddam media challenges the assumptions of both Iraq's foreign administrators as well as its domestic guardians of virtue.

Iraqis like to say that they gave mankind the written word 5,000 years ago. Iraqi journalists boast that the first Arabic newspaper, *Al Zawra*, was printed in Baghdad 135 years ago, and that the nation's first television station was launched in 1956, the same year that TV came to Sweden. Spirited, mostly politically partisan papers flourished until the late 1960s. Iraqis continue to pride themselves on their appetite for the printed word. "What is written in Cairo is published in Beirut but read in Baghdad," the saying goes.

All this ended in the violent coup d'état of July 17, 1968, that ushered in the era of Hussein's Baath Party. One of the Baathists' first acts was to jail Abdel Aziz Barakat, then head of the journalists' union, and shut down his newspaper, *al Manar*, which at the time was one of the most professional dailies in Iraq. Barakat was charged as an American spy and executed a month later.

Baathists placed a stranglehold on the press, turning it into a tool to glorify Saddam and his family. Underground or independent media were unheard of. Decree number 840, which Saddam



**MEDIA MASS:**  
Some of the entries in the riot of new Iraqi newspapers.

Durgham Hashemi, a young journalist at *al Thawra*, disappeared a week after he criticized articles in his own newspaper that claimed Iraq's Shiite Arabs came from India. As many as 500 Iraqi journalists, artists, writers, and intellectuals have been executed or disappeared and are presumed dead since 1968, according to the International Alliance for Justice, a French human rights group.

But Saddam's grip on the media wasn't airtight. Though heavily infiltrated by the intelligence services, for example, the faculty of the University of Baghdad's College of Mass Media tried to teach their students the fundamentals of good reporting.

signed in 1986, made death the maximum penalty for criticizing the government. Even carrying copies of unofficial newspapers posed a huge risk. In 2001, Kurdish officials say, a man was caught in the city of Khaneqin with a copy of *al Ittihad*, one of the newspapers published in the Kurdish-run northern section of Iraq. He was sentenced to twenty-one years in jail.

Tales from Saddam's prisons filled the nightmares of fearful journalists. The names of disappeared journalists went unspoken. Theraqem Hashem, a writer for *Horass al Waqtan* magazine, was arrested in 1992 and never heard from again.

Aziz al Sayed Jassem, who wrote political books, was arrested in 1991 and disappeared after he refused to write a book extolling Saddam's glories. That same year

"When I taught I would give the academic view," says Mo'ayed al Khafaf, a lecturer at the college. "How to write news, how to write a column, how to conduct an investigation. We taught students that they had to be brave, tell the truth, and be accurate." The problem, al Khafaf says, wasn't what students studied, but rather that the Ministry of Information controlled everything they wrote.

Even Iraq's American administrators are impressed with the skills of Iraq's journalists. "There are a lot of talented young people who just need some training, some highly technically competent people," says Mike Furlong.

In 1992, Saddam's oldest son, Uday — by all accounts, a brutal man who treated his pet lions far better than his many underlings — was "unanimously" elected head of the journalists' union and launched a number of purportedly independent publications, television stations, and radio operations. These allowed Saddam and Uday to attack their opponents without the formal imprimatur of the state-owned media. They also allowed the government to expand its system of rewards for sycophantic journalists. One broadcaster, for instance, received \$2,500 and a Honda for his on-air call for the reelection of Saddam Hussein, says Khalil Ibrahim, a reporter for *Fajr Baghdad*.

But some of the journalists on Uday's payroll — many were graduates of the College of Mass Media — took the independent label seriously.

In 1997 *Nab al Shabab*, the Uday-controlled weekly paper of the Youth Union, began publishing articles that were unprecedented both in terms of their subject matter and as examples of journalists trying hard to retain their integrity in the harshest environment. "We criticized the government's behavior," says Mohamed Bedewi al Shamari, a former *Nab al Shabab* writer who is now an editor for *Ashiraa*, a new, 5,000-circulation weekly. "We criticized the checkpoints, the limited freedoms of the people, the actions of the Baathist security officers. We called on the government to respect the people's rights." Al Shamari and others who worked at these "independent" publications say they were able to get away with such criticism, ironically, because of the twisted reality of life under Saddam. Because they were known as Uday's publications, others in the regime mostly left them alone. And although Uday was a



despot in his own right, he was also a bit of a loose cannon, these journalists say, and he argued with his father over what the papers wrote. Still, journalists did not dare criticize Saddam Hussein directly.

Instead, they pecked around him. One article in 1998 by Hashem Hassan, *Nab al Shabab's* editor, accused Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz of wasting his time and the country's money on foreign trips and speeches. Others chronicled the growing prostitution and crime problems. "We always went out in the streets and reported these stories out," says Saad al Awsi, a former news director of *Nab al Shabab*.

But in March 1998 the newspaper pushed too far, publishing a satirical front-page piece about Iraqi opposition groups. The headline, ANNOUNCEMENT #1, typically heralds a coming change in government. The piece included photos of opposition figures, such as Ahmad Chalabi.

Saddam cracked down. The paper's staff was pushed out. Al Awsi was banned from writing. Al Shamari managed a job at *Musawar al Arabi*, another Uday-owned weekly, and began writing an opinion column that touched upon the same themes. In September 1998, two men in an unmarked car came to his office and took al Shamari away. He was jailed for eight days without charges. "They didn't even take down my name," al Shamari says. "They were trying to send a message."

Hashem Hassan was briefly jailed, too, and eventually fled to the autonomous Kurdish north early last year, where freedom from Saddam's rule since 1991 has ushered in a relatively free press, including several newspapers completely independent of political parties.

Over time, many Iraqi journalists fled Saddam's rule and found success in other countries. And today's media bloom springs in part from these long-dormant seeds of press freedom planted years earlier.



**NEWSMAN:** Ahmad al Rikabi returned from exile to run the U.S.-backed Iraqi Media Network. The former London bureau chief of *Radio Free Iraq* wants to teach his employees to be balanced journalists.

**T**he media universe in Iraq these days is populated by everything from Islamists to exiled media tycoons to local politicians to collectives run by idealistic journalists. Regardless of their ultimate goal, though, all are far more likely to look for guidance to the wider Arab world, or to their own traditions, than to America and the West.

The London-based *Azzaman*, run by an exiled Iraqi journalist, began planning to publish an Iraq edition months before Saddam's fall. The full-color, twenty-page daily, carrying international and local news as well as celebrity gossip and sports, has wowed Baghdad. Filled with news from around the world and the Middle East, the mildly Arab-nationalist paper often publishes articles skeptical of U.S. aims in Iraq and the region. And it's the hottest paper in town, with a circulation that Hathem Aziza, *Azzaman's* general manager, claims has grown to 30,000. He hopes to reach 50,000 by summer's end, and 100,000 by

the end of the year. Editions of *Azzaman* are also published in London, Bahrain, and Algeria.

Just days after the regime fell, volunteers in the city of Karbala, southwest of Baghdad, took over an abandoned 100-watt television substation and began broadcasting over a range of about twelve miles. *Karbala TV* mixes Koranic verses with pirated satellite news broadcasts, cartoons, and local news segments about the city's electrical and water problems, put together by volunteers using handheld camcorders. Announcers sit in a scruffy "studio," a desk and chair in front of a black backdrop. A committee of locals runs the station, making programming decisions by consensus. "It's a free, independent television station," says Haydar Noori, an electrical engineer who spends his spare time as a technician. "We don't receive any support from anyone."

Meanwhile, *Najaf TV* broadcasts eight hours a day from a tiny one-kilowatt substation once used to strengthen Baghdad broadcasts. "We cover all of Najaf's problems, the city council elections, the gas shortage," says Ali Abdul Kareem Kashaf al Qeta, the volunteer station manager who fled Iraq after he launched *Radio Najaf* during the Shiite uprising against Saddam that was brutally crushed in 1991. "We found out early that the problem of water was connected to the electricity problem," he says. "We broadcast images of the destroyed power stations and got people to fix the problem. Now the water is back."

New newspapers include *Al Riazy al Jadeed*, a sports weekly, and the *Baghdad Bulletin*, an English-language bimonthly launched by American college students studying in Lebanon. The twice-weekly *Al Ahrar* was launched with \$10,000 by a thirty-six-year-old candy merchant. The twice-weekly *Asaa*, with a print run of 10,000, is overseen by Adeeb Shabaan, Uday's longtime personal secretary, who had a falling-out

with him and was imprisoned in the last months of the regime.

The new publications mostly crib reports from the wires as well as major international and Arabic newspapers. Some of them, though not all, are little more than mouthpieces for political parties and groups that have sprung up. The free, eight-page Communist party paper was among the first to hit Baghdad's streets after Saddam's fall. "It appears the political press is getting in first and gaining advantage," says Mark Pomar, president of IREX, a Washington-based group that has helped train independent media in Eastern Europe and Asia.

The new press remains obsessed with the Saddam era and haunted by his Baath party's thirty-five-year rule. Articles about his misdeeds and mass graves fill the pages. The papers pump out salacious stories about Saddam and his family's troubles and exploits, making them sound like characters in *Dynasty* rather than fearsome dictators. QUSAY GRABBED \$1 BILLION AND 70 BILLION EUROS BEFORE THE WAR, screamed a headline in *Al Adala*, a new daily published by the pro-Iranian Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. UDAY AND HIS MOTHER KILLED MAN WHO INTRODUCED HIM TO SADDAM'S SECOND WIFE, said *Al Shams*, a new weekly. UDAY OFFERED \$1.5 MILLION TO FIRE EDITOR IN CHIEF OF JORDANIAN NEWSPAPER, said *Al Sumer*, a highbrow daily published by the Iraqi Media Network. AFTER THREE YEARS OF A SECRET RELATIONSHIP, WOMAN MARRIED SADDAM AFTER HE FORCED HER TO DIVORCE HER HUSBAND, reported *Al Resalah*, a religious weekly.

The new press also hasn't been shy about publishing negative articles on the motives and methods of the American invasion force, which now numbers nearly 160,000. U.S. AND EUROPEANS RACE TO WIN IRAQ MOBILE PHONE CONTRACTS, reported *Al Ayam*. SECURITY HAS BECOME A DREAM THAT WILL NEVER COME TRUE, read a headline in *Al Adala*, over an article declaring that Iraq will never have true safety until the Americans leave and a national government takes over. UNDER AMERICA'S WATCH, RAPING, KILLING, BURNING AND LOOTING, said *Al Ahrar*.

Despite all the freedom, criticism of the influence and methods of Iraq's religious leaders is still off limits. Many journalists say Iraq remains at heart a traditional, religious country. "We don't have to criticize sacred values, especially in the beginning," says Hamid Ali Alkifaey, a former Iraqi exile journalist.

If the press has refrained from critiquing the political power of the Islamic hierarchy, it has enthusiastically published photographs of scantily clad women that would offend Islamists' cultural sensitivities. Back pages are filled with celebrity gossip and chatter from the Arab world as well as Hollywood. WHO WILL BE MISS UNIVERSE? asked a headline in *Alahali*, a new weekly, above a picture of a former Panamanian beauty queen, Justine Pasek, wearing a see-through blouse. EGYPTIAN ACTRESS CHOSEN TO PORTRAY SADDAM'S GIRLFRIEND IN UPCOMING MOVIE, declared a headline on the back page of *Azzaman*.

**T**he media explosion will likely abate unless the Iraqi economy — eroded by twelve years of sanctions and then knocked flat by the war — quickly picks up and generates advertising revenue, say experts at nonprofit organizations who've rebuilt media in other war-torn countries. "Now we can see a thousands flowers blooming," said Antti Kuusi of the Baltic Media Centre, a Denmark-based organization. "But it won't last, because no media here is able to function profitably."

In addition to money, the newspapers need a legal framework in which to operate. In early June, Iraqi opposition figures and journalist-rights activists gathered in Athens for a forum on an Iraqi media law. "We want to have an independent media," says Hamid Ali Alkifaey, one of the conference's organizers. "And you can't have new media without a new media law that clearly defines the relationship between the press and the government."

Meanwhile, the U.S. authorities in Baghdad were drafting a media "code of conduct" — including the licensing of broadcast outlets and a possible regulatory board to monitor media. This elicited howls of protest from Iraqi journalists, who called it censorship. At press time, details of the code — as well as its ultimate fate — were not available. But the idea, say U.S. officials, is to prevent hate speech or ideas that hinder the development of a civil society. "There's no room for hateful messages that will destabilize the emerging Iraqi democracy," says Mike Furlong.

In addition to the Americans, a handful of international organizations have mobilized to help Iraqi journalists. In late April and early May, representatives from media charities and liberal

publications such as *The Nation* and *Salon* met in London to coordinate efforts to rebuild Iraq's media, says Rohan Jayasekera, a veteran of reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Georgia, and Cyprus. "Of all these countries, Iraq has the resources to rebuild its media in the long run," says Jayasekera. "You have money, education, political participation. You add all that together and it's a great growing environment for independent, professional media."

For now, though, most Iraqi journalists have put aside worries about long-term survival as they dive joyfully into new freedoms and reconnect to their nation's literary past. After graduating from journalism school, Ashtar Ali Yasseri, twenty-five, wrote for *al Zawra*, a mouthpiece for Uday's journalists' union. After the fall of Saddam, she and her father relaunched *Habebbooz*, a satirical Baghdad paper last published in 1932. One early issue of the illustrated weekly included a mock interview with Jay Garner, then the Pentagon's top man in Iraq, in which he describes his love of Mosul's kabobs. "This is the best time for this kind of newspaper," says Ali Yasseri. "It's good to make fun of things. It feels good to laugh."

*Al Manar* has also been relaunched after a thirty-five-year absence, and dedicated to its founder, Aziz Abdel Barakat, the journalism union chief whose execution in 1968 marked the beginning of the Iraqi media's darkest days. The 15,000-circulation daily has ambition, with forty journalists and bureaus in Hilla, Karbala, Najaf, Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul. Without working phone lines, reporters file stories via courier, says Taha Arif Muhammad, the sprightly sixty-seven-year-old editor for whom Barakat was a mentor. "Some day, we would love to add bureaus in Jordan, Syria, and the United Arab Emirates," he said.

One day in late May, two American soldiers — most likely from Army civil affairs units — came by to ask Muhammad what his newspaper needed. "I told them, 'We don't want financial support or equipment or any other kind of help,'" he recalls. "But if you have any news tips, please give them to us." ■

*Borzou Daragahi, a Tehran-based journalist, wrote about the rebirth of Afghanistan's media for the July/August 2002 CJR. He can be reached at borzou@aol.com.*

# Can Reuters Recover?

*The Venerable Agency Needs a New Strategy for Success*

BY JUDITH MATLOFF

**O**n a busy day, Reuters's 197 bureaus flash thousands of corporate results to bankers and brokers who make up the bulk of its clients. Even if all 2,500 members of its editorial staff had the inclination to sit down and read all the dispatches from ninety-four countries, they probably wouldn't be able to plough through the exotic offerings in languages like Korean and Turkish that reflect the global reach of the world's largest multimedia news agency.

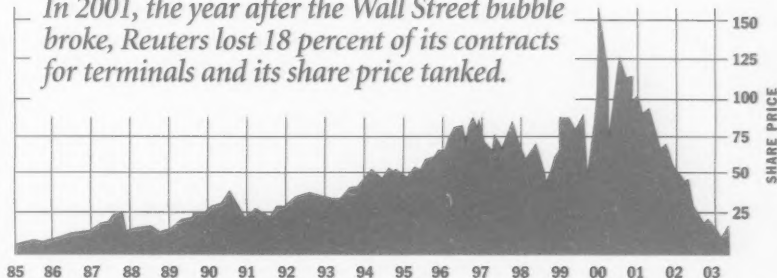
But last February 18, nearly every Reuters employee tensely watched a news story that appeared on computer terminals. It was about their employer, and it was ominous. Reuters announced its first pretax loss since going public in 1984, and said that to stay afloat, 3,000 employees, or 19 percent of the 16,000-member total work force, would be let go, adding to the 2,300 sacked during the previous two years. The world's leading financial news and information provider had hit the nadir of its 152-year history.

The venerable agency, headquartered in a dignified limestone building on London's Fleet Street, is trusted in the world's newsrooms for its reportage, still photography, and television footage. But 90 percent of its revenue stems from financial information provided to investors and bankers on computer terminals. So Reuters felt the fallout when the financial sector's implosion wiped out an estimated 100,000 jobs on Wall Street and in London. Some 18 percent of its contracts for terminals were canceled last year, and its share price sank 70 percent.

The collapse that has made Reuters vulnerable to takeover cannot be blamed solely on a buckled financial sector. At fault was a leadership that missed the threat of hungrier upstarts, competitors who more quickly woke up to the idea of harnessing low-cost Internet technology.

Reuters's business decline has dire im-

*In 2001, the year after the Wall Street bubble broke, Reuters lost 18 percent of its contracts for terminals and its share price tanked.*



plications for its general-news operation, which cannot sustain itself if the financial-data side goes under. Correspondents, so far largely untouched by the mass layoffs, fear they won't remain invulnerable forever. Although the agency's coverage of the Iraq war was widely praised, anxiety reigns. "There's a real feeling of crisis in London," says one desk editor. Reuters journalists worry that the company won't invest enough money to maintain its reputation for accuracy, objectivity, and speed.

Over the past twenty years, Reuters amassed 1,000 products, such as foreign-language data services, using diverse and sometimes incompatible delivery systems. Subscribers defected to Bloomberg and to Canada's Thomson Corporation, which launched simpler and sometimes cheaper systems to transmit information. Bloomberg's terminals are easier to use; Thompson's service costs less. Bloomberg is gaining market share; it saw a 1 percent growth in users in the first three months of this year, versus Reuters's 5 percent drop. Like so many financial analysts scrutinizing Reuters, editorial employees are wondering if the company's first American CEO, Tom Glocer, who took over in July 2001 with no editorial and scant business experience, has the talent to orchestrate a recovery.

Glocer is taking the heat, but he inherited a mess that was in the making for years. Reuters's ascent was as spectacular as its fall, and serves as a cautionary tale of how not to run a company. "They were totally arrogant and complacent," says Barry Simpson, a former media manager, who is writing a book on Reuters. "By the mid-1990s they lost any sense of direction and were making it up as they went along."

The downside can be traced to 1973, when the company introduced a small black and green screen known prosaically as Monitor. Reuters was then a scruffy but prestigious news agency, with a heavy emphasis on business information going back to the days when it delivered stock prices via carrier pigeons. Monitor provided an electronic marketplace for foreign exchange just as the Bretton-Woods fixed-rate system ended. It became almost overnight a must-have for currency traders and bankers.

Emboldened by a windfall it never expected, Reuters embarked on a breakneck expansion over the next two decades that saw the staff increase from 2,400, mainly journalists, to 19,000, most of them on the financial-technical side. After Reuters went public in 1984, its shares soared, split, soared, split again.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the firm morphed



TOM GLOCER

into a global giant on a takeover spree, acquiring photo and television arms and Instinet, the (now money-losing) electronic brokerage, as well as other ventures. All the while, Reuters's executives, many of whom began as journalists, were over their heads running such a growing behemoth.

Peter Job, a former journalist, took over in 1991 and seemed to tack in a different direction, embarking on a risk-averse decade. Reuters resisted bold proposals for strategic purchases that could further its brand. The company rejected a chance to buy Dun and Bradstreet, the providers of international business credit information. It decided against launching a twenty-four-hour business news channel in the early 1990s, leaving the field to CNBC. Job had to be cajoled by American executives into signing a deal for Reuters to sell its material cheaply to CNN in return for getting its brand name on screen. Job balked at a chance in 1994 to give AOL \$10 million (plus the money-losing software company Reality Technologies) in exchange for 10 percent of AOL. It was only in 1999 that Reuters began to take the Internet seriously. Bosses played down the threat of Bloomberg, whose terminals sprouted on traders' desks in the mid-1990s. While Bloomberg's service was more expensive

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technology.**

and lacked the expertise and global reach of Reuters, its delivery and pricing systems were less complex. Bloomberg understood marketing — displaying its name everywhere, even if it meant handing out the service free at train stations and in newsrooms. Unlike the technicians at Reuters, the ones at Bloomberg responded quickly to breakdowns.

Reuters's management, meanwhile, alienated its own journalists as well as customers. After the company went public, a gulf widened between the general-news and financial sides, with the former complaining of second-class treatment. Job did not hide his disdain for his former colleagues, railing against them in meetings as disloyal and expensive, according to people who were present. All the while, writers were told to churn out ever more stories for an expanding array of services, with little extra compensation.

The feeling that reporters were undervalued reached a head in the mid-1990s, in what some call the Stalinist purges. Several senior journalists were pushed out, ostensibly because they were too costly. Foreign correspondents were brusquely demoted to local status, robbed of their housing allowances and business-class flights. Fearing they, too,

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would be sacked, more than two dozen seasoned journalists opted out from 1997 to 2001, when Reuters offered attractive retirement packages. Valuable institutional memory vanished.

Many blame the outgoing chairman of the board, Sir Christopher Hogg, for failing to settle the CEO succession issue properly during his seventeen-year reign. If Job couldn't steer the company right during fat times, his successor Glocer, forty-three, is an unlikely candidate to turn it around during the lean. His appointment was not predicated on achievements; although smart and well spoken, he was never in any job long enough during his decade at Reuters to make major mistakes. Glocer and other top executives received £2.2 million in bonuses during 2002, Reuters's worst-performing year. The staff was especially appalled that Glocer's £612,000 bonus was based partly on meeting profit-margin targets — or cutting jobs. They were galled, too, that at a time when even the fruit basket in the London newsroom was deemed too costly, and their savings in Reuters shares had evaporated, Glocer enjoyed an £816,000 salary and £230,000 housing allowance.

Glocer justified his payout on the grounds that it is tough to lead a company during hard times, and that he had spent half of it buying Reuters shares to show confidence. But shareholders voiced disgust during the annual general meeting in April and, following pressure from big investors, Reuters promised to restructure bonuses to greater reflect targets like revenue and pretax profits.

Glocer must now prove to skeptics that his recovery plan will succeed. He vows to discard three-quarters of Reuters's products and some consulting services, among other goals. In June the company announced that Chief Operating Officer Philip Green was resigning, and that his duties would transfer to a management committee headed by Glocer as part of a plan to streamline senior management.

His biggest challenge will be wooing customers back from Bloomberg. Reuters has duplicated some of Bloomberg's more popular offerings, such as instant messaging, although analysts say that move in October came years too late.

Some reporters harbor cautious optimism that editorial will remain protected, given Glocer's recent vow that Reuters will refocus more on its core business of news and data. And indeed, editorial has been largely sheltered in the most recent job cuts. A test of his commitment to news was the coverage of the

Iraq war, which by all accounts was spectacular. Stephen Jukes, global head of news, says Glocer didn't flinch when told how much money was needed: "The company put its money where its mouth is with the coverage of Iraq." Reuters hurled more than £2 million and 150 of its best staff members into Iraq and nearby countries. Newspapers around the world liked Reuters's coverage as an antidote to the rah-rah patriotism of much U.S. media reporting. Photographers captured some of the iconic scenes of the war, including a marine cradling an injured Iraqi child. Hits on the Reuters Web site doubled to five million a day.

There's no guarantee that Glocer will continue to allocate resources where needed, or hold onto good staff people. Unions engaged in contract negotiations say the company is playing hardball by trying to reduce benefits.

While Jukes sees a major shift to put editorial at the center again, he is philosophical about what will happen if the business side doesn't rebound: "Of course," he says, "we don't defy gravity." ■

*Judith Matloff, a writer living in New York, teaches at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. She worked for Reuters from 1983 to 1994.*

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## **Announces THE KAISER MEDIA INTERNSHIPS IN URBAN HEALTH REPORTING FOR 2003**

### ***An internship program for young minority journalists interested in specializing in urban public health reporting***

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Sam Bresnahan - *The Plain Dealer, Cleveland*  
Jamie Francisco - *The San Jose Mercury News*  
Kimm Groshong - *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*  
Julie Ishida - *The Washington Post*  
Greta Lorge - *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*  
Kathy Lutz - *The Boston Globe*  
Rasha Madkour - *The Detroit Free Press*  
Ofelia Madrid - *The Oregonian*  
Ana Valdes - *The Sun-Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale*  
Laticha Scott - *KTVU-2, San Francisco-Oakland*  
Lauren Acuña - *KXAS-5, Dallas-Fort Worth*  
Yunji de Nies - *WAGA-5, Atlanta*

The Kaiser Internship Program provides an initial week-long briefing on urban public health issues and health reporting in Washington, D.C. Interns are then based for ten weeks at their newspaper/TV station, typically under the direction of the Health or Metro Editor/News Director, where they report on health issues. The program ends with a 3-day meeting and site visits in Boston. Interns receive a 12-week stipend and travel expenses. The aim is to provide young journalists or journalism college graduates with an in-depth introduction to and practical experience on the specialist health beat. For more details, check our website at [www.kff.org](http://www.kff.org); to apply for the 2004 program, e-mail or write to:

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Executive Director of the Kaiser Media Fellowships Program  
Kaiser Family Foundation  
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# Now and Forever

## *Who Should Enter the Journalistic Pantheon?*

BY MITCHELL STEPHENS

Journalism — unlike literature, theater, art, music, film, or situation comedy — has never had much of a canon, a reasonably well-accepted collection of great works. This is lamentable. It leaves us, as we read the latest dispatch from Washington or a war zone, without models that might help us understand what such a dispatch might be. It allows us to mistake an interesting feature in the *Times* this week or some particularly persuasive piece of reporting in the current *New Yorker* for the best that journalism has to offer.

The absence of an established canon also deprives journalism of much of the nobility it might have. Couldn't a reminder that large talents once wielded our pens and tapped on our keyboards provide some consolation as we face the latest wave of criticism? Perhaps we have lost ourselves once again in some unedifying scandal; perhaps another young reporter has taken leave of the facts; but this is also the profession that stationed an Edward R. Murrow in London, that imbedded a Tom Wolfe with the hippies.

There is one benefit, however, to the absence of any widely accepted notion of what are the greatest works of journalism: it means that any of us with some time to spend in the library can piece together our own lists. My colleagues and I have had a go at this. For many years now, all graduate students in journalism at New York University have been inspired by some version of the collection we have assembled. And a few years ago — together with a panel of distinguished, library-going journalists — we selected "the top hundred works of journalism in the United States in the twentieth century." Neither exercise, alas, however meri-



torious or well-publicized, has done much to alter the situation: journalism still doesn't have much of a canon.

Which means that Jon E. Lewis, a British writer and historian, is free to take a shot at coming up with one. That Lewis has settled upon a hundred and one articles is not a gimmick I am in a position to question. That his publisher bills the works in this collection as "masterpieces" — "greatest newspaper articles," in the British edition — in a book that is the forty-fifth in the *Mam-*

*moth Book of...* series, following not only *The Mammoth Book of Arthurian Legends* but *The Mammoth Book of UFOs*, is certainly not auspicious.

Nonetheless, much fine writing and reporting is enshrined in this book. Lewis reprints, to begin with, some classics (by which I mean writings with which I am familiar): Grantland Rice's inflation of four Notre Dame football players to apocalyptic proportions ("In dramatic lore they are known as Famine, Pestilence, Destruction and Death. These are only aliases. Their real names are Stuhldreher, Miller, Crowley and Layden"); Murrow's celebration of the humble courage of the people of London during the blitz (The humble courage of the English is a theme that recurs in this volume); Ernie Pyle's graceful tiptoe along the line between maudlin and deeply moving in "The Death of Captain Waskow"; Seymour Hersh's lonely exposure of the My Lai massacre; selections from Tom Wolfe's kinetic and revelatory *Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and John Hersey's stunning account of the destruction of Hiroshima, first printed in *The New Yorker*. (All of the above were on our top-hundred list, with Hersey's work ranked first.)

Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Jack London, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemingway, George Orwell, and Norman Mailer are also represented here. So are writers, such as William Howard Russell and Richard Harding Davis, who may have been just about as well known in their time but whose reputations have faded because they were earned in (canon-less) journalism more than in (canon-heavy) fiction.

Lewis also comes up with some surprises (to me, it being rather easy to surprise me with the work of British journalists): a young fellow by the name of

**THE MAMMOTH  
BOOK OF JOURNALISM**  
EDITED BY JON E. LEWIS  
CARROLL & GRAF  
546 PP. \$12.95

Winston Churchill, for example, reporting for the *Morning Post* from South Africa in 1900, during the Boer War: "I do not fight. But swords are not the only weapons in the world. Something may be done with a pen." And Lewis includes a glimpse of the destruction of a city — and a lesson in the power of a conjunction — penned by Archibald Forbes, a reporter for London's *Daily News*. Forbes (one of a number of his contributors about whom our editor tells us nothing) is writing about the suppression of the Paris Commune in 1871:

"Paris the beautiful" is Paris the ghastly, Paris the battered, Paris the burning, Paris the blood-splattered, now. And this is the nineteenth century, and Europe professes civilization, and France boasts of culture, and Frenchmen are braining one another with the butt ends of muskets, and Paris is burning.

Lewis's collection is not, however, without its holes. (Some of the fine pieces he has included, I should acknowledge, make me realize that the collections I have helped put together have also had some holes.) To begin with — and in the grand tradition of canons — Lewis celebrates mostly the work of white males. Based on my analysis of first names, seven women are honored with bylines here, including Dorothy Parker (arguing for Hemingway's short stories over his novels), Martha Gellhorn (observing, with horrifying impotence, a lynching), and Gloria Steinem ("I Was a Playboy Bunny"). Lewis might have looked more closely at the work of, among others, Margaret Fuller, Dorothy Thompson, the British travel writer Freya Stark, Joan Didion, and Rachel Carson. (Carson's *Silent Spring* was ranked second on our top hundred list.) I also failed to recognize the names of any African-American writers in his table of contents. (I don't know how many British journalists of color are included.) Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and James Baldwin certainly deserve to be there.

This collection — however mammoth — also seems to start rather late (with Dickens in 1845). And it is not always clear that Lewis has ferreted out the best work of the writers he does include. The two Dickens pieces he reproduces here are good; "On Duty with Inspector Field," which Lewis does not include, may be better. An excerpt:

How many people may there be in London, who, if we had brought them deviously and blindfolded, to this street, fifty paces from the Station House, and within call of St. Giles's church, would know it for a not remote part of the city in which their lives are passed? How many...may there be, that could look round on the faces which now hem us in... — the lowering foreheads, the sallow cheeks, the brutal eyes, the matted hair, the infected, vermin-haunted heaps of rags — and say "I have thought of this. I have not dismissed the thing. I have neither blustered it away, nor frozen it away, nor tied it up and put it away, nor smoothly said pooh, pooh! to it, when it has been shown to me?"

Lewis, perhaps more egregiously, calls on Hemingway merely for what seems a Spanish Civil War roundup, instead of allowing him to demonstrate his knack for haunting detail. This, on that same conflict but not in this collection, is from "A New Kind of War":

A policeman covers the top of the trunk, from which the head is missing; they send for someone to repair the gas main and you go in to breakfast. A charwoman, her eyes red, is scrubbing the blood off the marble floor of the corridor. The dead man wasn't you nor anyone you know and everyone is very hungry in the morning after a cold night and a long day the day before up at the Guadalajara front.

One of the reasons work in this field has failed to gel into a canon is that it is difficult to figure out what exactly to canonize. Are we celebrating stories about major events? Lewis often does. Thus we get a bit of Merriman Smith's not particularly distinguished recollection of covering the Kennedy assassination for United Press International, coverage for which he did win a Pulitzer Prize. (Among Smith's more memorable accomplishments that day was the football move, not discussed here, with which he prevented the Associated Press reporter from getting to the car phone.) And, perhaps inevitably, we are given a *Daily Telegraph* account of England's World Cup triumph in 1966, complete with a listing of players and referees.

Most major wars also get a shout in Lewis's collection, as do a series of cata-

strophes. He professes, in his short introduction, to be interested in "the eyewitness capture and compression in words of events." He is interested, in other words, in journalism as history — or journalism as an up-close, open-eyed, if sometimes ragged and unreflective, "first draft of history" (a phrase Lewis uses). They were there, so you have a chance to be, in a sense, there — a privilege, no doubt. But this approach seems more a celebration of journalism's existence — of the fact that someone with some descriptive talent has usually managed to be on the scene — than of its possibilities.

Another standard that might be used in putting together such a collection is the historical significance of the journalism itself. This is not Lewis's strong point. Henry Morton Stanley's account, in the *New York Herald*, of finding the missing missionary Dr. David Livingstone deep in Africa does not appear here, nor does the editorial writer Francis Church's lyrical response in the *New York Sun* to eight-year-old Virginia's question about the existence of Santa Claus:

Virginia, your little friends are wrong. They have been affected by the skepticism of a skeptical age. They do not believe except they see. They think that nothing can be which is not comprehensible by their little minds. All minds, Virginia, whether they be men's or children's, are little.

The journalism that actually nudged the world along is also not that well represented in this collection — for example, Horace Greeley's "The Prayer of Twenty Millions," which may have helped inspire Lincoln to free the slaves. Perhaps most shamefully, he does not include Thomas Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, which spread across the colonies like, as one newspaper at the time put it, "a ray of revelation." (Surely Lewis understands that journalism can bring revelation through its deployment of analysis and opinion as well as its deployment of fact; in his introduction he makes clear that while his book mostly features "reportage," it also includes "the occasional piece of humor, opinion and journalist's memoir.")

The *Mammoth Book of Journalism* divides itself fairly evenly between British and American journalism (with a piece or two from Australia and South Africa thrown in). But Lincoln Steffens and his



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fellow American muckrakers are not here. And the book does not include anything from Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's Watergate investigation, although their work is mentioned in its introduction.

William Howard Russell's reporting for the *Times* of London on the poorly run British campaign in the Crimea was indeed historically significant, as Lewis notes, because Russell's criticism of the military led to important reforms. His article, included in this book, on the battle of Balaclava has an added significance: Alfred Tennyson read it.

A comparison of Russell's and Tennyson's accounts of the hopeless and, consequently, achingly courageous charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava raises what is perhaps the most important question about the possibility of a journalistic canon:

*Russell:* "They advanced in two lines, quickening their pace as they closed towards the enemy. A more fearful spectacle was never witnessed than by those who, without the power to aid, beheld their heroic countrymen rushing to the arms of death."

*Tennyson:* "Into the valley of death/rode the six hundred."

*Russell:* "Their desperate valor knew no bounds, and far indeed was it removed from its so-called better part — discretion."

*Tennyson:* "Theirs not to make reply,/Theirs not to reason why,/Theirs but to do and die."

The question (if you agree with me that the poet gets somewhat the best of this comparison): Is journalism — for all its speed and freshness, its witness to history, its contributions to history — really good enough to command a canon? Didn't Dickens and Hemingway — to approach the question from a different direction — do their best writing in another genre? The answer — the ultimate justification for celebrating the great works of journalism — has to be found, of course, in the anointed works themselves. They must stand, in the end, as something much more than mere "first drafts."

The observations they contain must have — and retain — an extraordinary power. This dispatch from a war zone was written for the *New York Tribune* in 1914 by Richard Harding Davis. It is from Lewis's collection:

The entrance of the German army into Brussels has lost the human quality. It was lost as soon as the three soldiers who led the army bicycled into the Boulevard du Regent and asked the

way to the Gare du Nord. When they passed the human note passed with them.

What came after them, and twenty-four hours later is still coming, is not men marching, but a force of nature like a tidal wave, an avalanche or a river flooding its banks. At this moment it is rolling through Brussels as the swollen waters of the Concemaugh Valley swept through Johnstown.

The analysis these works of journalism display must be especially, if not astonishingly, compelling. The following lines, not included in this book, are from James Baldwin's account, published in the *Partisan Review* in 1959, of his first visit to an American South battling over school integration:

I saw the Negro schools in Charlotte, saw, on street corners, several of their alumnae, and read about others who had been sentenced to the chain gang. This solved the mystery of just what made Negro parents send their children out to face mobs.

The writing must carry exceptional force. These edifying sentences, also left out of Lewis's collection, were occasioned by a murder in Southern California. They were written for a magazine in 1966 by Joan Didion (at her most scathing):

This is the country in which a belief in the literal interpretation of Genesis has slipped imperceptibly into a belief in the literal interpretation of *Double Indemnity* . . . "We were just crazy kids," they say without regret, and look to the future. The future always looks good in the golden land, because no one remembers the past . . . Here is the last stop for all those who come from somewhere else, for all those who drifted away from the cold and the past and the old ways. Here is where they are trying to find a new life style, trying to find it in the only places they know to look: the movies and the newspapers.

Establishing a canon is hardly a simple business. We can debate, we must debate, what qualifies a work as great. That is part of the purpose. And canons are made to be challenged, reevaluated — endlessly. That is part of the fun. But surely in writings such as these — some included in Lewis's book, some not — there are the makings of a canon. ■

*Mitchell Stephens, a professor of journalism at New York University, is the author of The Rise of the Image the Fall of the Word and A History of News.*



# When Mondes Collide

## Has the watchdog of France gone mad?

BY MARK HUNTER

After two long decades in which *Le Monde* led the French assault on corruption in politics and business — a protracted muckraking era à la française — the authors Pierre Péan and Philippe Cohen, respectively France's leading free-lance investigative reporter and a business editor at the weekly *Marianne*, charge that it is no longer the watchdog, but the mad dog of France. The authors claim that "the place taken by this daily in the life and operations of the Republic is now decisive," and that the misuse of that power is directly responsible for a "degradation of democratic life in this country." They aren't just saying that *Le Monde*, with a circulation of over 400,000, sets a biased agenda for the rest of France's media, but that it increasingly creates the events it covers, for its own profit.

The book makes some telling points: *Le Monde* destroys not only corrupt politicians, but respectable leaders and citizens, on the basis of distorted evidence. One passage details how a government minister was forced to resign after *Le Monde* used scissor-cut quotes from his book about his days as the mayor of a rundown suburb to paint him as a racist. The daily also dictates policies at the highest levels of power — for example, by intervening in the government's attempts to resolve the crisis in Corsica, including publishing detailed information, apparently leaked by an ambitious official, that let a suspected Corsican nationalist assassin escape arrest. Some of these tales are known to anyone who regularly reads the Parisian press, but Péan and Cohen have documented them in startling depth and profusion.

Most startling, perhaps, is the revelation that *Le Monde* trades its power and pages for cash. In one of the book's best-documented chapters, we follow negotiations with the Norwegian media conglomerate, Schibsted, in 2000, as it sought to launch a free daily newspaper in France. For *Le Monde*, the potential rewards included contracts for its printing plant, a piece of the new daily's capital, and a proportional cut of the profits. In exchange, *Le Monde* promised to use "all the intellectual means at its dis-

posal" for the project's success, specifically including lobbying among various "actors, institutions, or companies," and "public opinion." The deal fell through, and *Le Monde's* editorial page demanded the "intervention" of public authorities to stop free dailies, in the name of journalism: "A question of principle is posed: Does not making information free devalue it?" Maybe — but then, what was *Le Monde* doing with Schibsted in the first place?

A dreadful irony permeates these passages. *Le Monde's* founder, Hubert Beuve-Méry, spent his career trying to set an example of public service and independence for a French press crippled by its collaboration with financiers and politicians before 1940, and with the Nazis immediately thereafter. After founding *Le Monde* in the newly liberated offices of an

### LA FACE CACHÉE DU MONDE: DU CONTRE-POUVOIR AUX ABUS DE POUVOIR

BY PIERRE PÉAN AND PHILIPPE COHEN  
ÉDITIONS MILLE ET UNE NUITS  
631 PP. 24 EUROS

Occupation-era newspaper in 1944, Beuve-Méry defined his journal's credo in an icily proud phrase: "We are poor, and we intend to remain so." *Le Monde's* strength was that it could not be bought. After surviving repeated financial crises, it has turned into a media group that defines its independence differently: Get rich, so no one can mess with you.

The book sold out its first printing of 20,000 copies within hours of publication, another 40,000 the first day, not counting copious extracts in the newsweekly *L'Express*, and current sales are estimated at over 250,000, according to the publisher — huge figures for France. It has generated a massive online debate, a still rare occurrence in France. Even rarer was an editorial in which *Le Monde*, which tends to dismiss criticism unless forced to respond by legal threats, conceded that a powerful newspaper may indeed "use its influence ill-advisedly, and it can be tempted to abuse its power." Nonetheless, the book's chief targets — *Le Monde's* director Jean-Marie Colombani, board director Alain

Minc, and editor-in-chief Edwy Plenel — plus eight other plaintiffs, filed separate lawsuits for defamation, collectively asking for over \$1 million in damages plus publication of the judgment in numerous journals.

My guess is that Péan and Cohen will find themselves in trouble when they go to court. (A trial date has not been set, and the case may not be heard before the winter.) They claim to perform a public service, "for *Le Monde*, and against those" — the plaintiffs — "who brought it where it is today." That surely won't exempt them from the two basic tests of French libel law, which are to get the story exactly right or to have shown "good faith" in researching and telling it. They repeatedly fail both tests. Multiple passages here are unprovable, badly sourced, or simply outright nasty. A tidbit gives the general flavor: Plenel is accused of using his journalism for a Trotskyist party in his youth as an "alibi" to prove to his father that he was doing something serious in life while his old man paid his bills. This unsourced insult hardly explains how Plenel came to play a historic role as the leading practitioner and theorist of French investigative reporting in the 1980s.

Cheap shots like these undercut one of the book's key themes — that investigative reporting in France has become a public menace: "This model of a moralizing, policing, even denouncing" — the French term used here, *délateur*, retains the sinister aura it acquired under the Nazis' boot — "journalism imposes its law from international news to culture." The proclaimed purity of the media's investigators becomes the pretext for a new corruption, of power without limit. One example among many: The authors recount how *Le Monde* (followed by the rest of France's media) trumpeted a highly dubious accusation of sexual harassment against a prominent intellectual, brought by a close relation of friends of one of the paper's directors.

The same charges against the media emerged in the U.S. after Watergate, but the context changes the content. *The Hidden Face of Le Monde* details (though it is not the first work to do so) how the paper gets nearly all its scoops: by persuading sources inside the judicial administration to feed it secret documents from corruption cases. Beginning in the early 1990s, that technique was used by French reporters and magistrates to prevent political leaders from quietly smothering corruption cases. Péan and Cohen argue that it is now used to blow

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cases out of proportion: In the fall of 1999, *Le Monde* forced the Socialist Minister of Finances, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, out of office on the ground that any minister who had been indicted should resign. In fact, though Strauss-Kahn was implicated in a fraud scandal, he hadn't been indicted. He was later tried for having antedated a consulting bill, but was acquitted.

As the authors point out, *Le Monde's* pages have become France's contemporary Balzac, a *feuilleton* that readers can follow day by day. But feeding the daily scoop machine means running a growing risk of being manipulated by anyone with damaging information, true or not, about a public figure. Thus rivals of President Jacques Chirac nearly sabotaged his campaign in 1995 by feeding *Le Monde* the phony "news" that he and his wife cut a sweetheart land deal with a municipal agency of Paris.

The fact remains that before Plenel and a thin platoon of other reporters made it their business to crack the state's doings, France was a country in which very little could be or was said about the ways of its rulers. Shattering that secrecy was no small or ignoble feat. But the authors argue that the state legitimately requires secrecy to go about its work. It's an argument that can lead to disaster, as the Pentagon Papers demonstrated in 1971. But that doesn't mean it's totally without merit. Unfortunately, the authors' idea of a demonstration is to accuse Plenel of attacking one of former President François Mitterrand's close advisers "because he tried to protect the apparatus of the State" from Plenel's "constant incursions." In the process, one of Plenel's historic scoops — that the French secret services bombed a boat belonging to Greenpeace at Auckland in 1985, killing one of the passengers — is portrayed as a mere by-product of a power struggle inside the government, with Plenel in the role of a manipulated and manipulating mouthpiece. I'd say a pointless killing went down, and people in high places let it go down until reporters exposed it. How can you justify keeping murder secret?

Another charge rings more true: The real investigative work in Paris isn't in *Le Monde* anymore. (One of its staffers candidly admits, "Our rule is to follow judicial inquiries, we don't do our own.") That honor belongs to reporters like Hervé Liffman at the weekly *Canard Enchaîné*, who broke the story of voting fraud in Paris by computer-assisted

analysis of voter lists. The authors are right in suggesting that Plenel's many imitators, at *Le Monde* and elsewhere, have inherited his legendary aggressiveness without his talent or his network of highly-placed sources. The result — just as in the U.S. when every cub reporter was a wannabe Woodstein — is a bullying, superficial brand of exposés. Not for nothing do opinion surveys show that public confidence in the veracity of media reports is sinking in France.

Do the authors map a better future for French journalism? Not really, though Péan could have. He practices a method based on the patient gathering and analysis of public information, followed by the cultivation of targeted source relationships leading to material held outside the state. His past exploits include beating Plenel to the documented facts about Mitterrand's past as an official of the Nazi-collaborating Vichy regime. But he makes an odd match with Cohen, who belongs to the old polemical tradition of French reporting. Cohen's hand shows in a fourteen-page chapter comparing *Le Monde's* published accounts to Enron's, based largely on an anonymous financier's brutal opinions, at a moment when *Le Monde* is considering selling shares on the Paris stock exchange. If this is the future of French investigative reporting, it's no improvement.

Has this book changed anything? It has for me. In 1995 I withheld suing *Le Monde* after it ran a review of one of my investigative books. The review, by a staff writer who was criticized in the work, began with an invented quote and was capped by accusations that key passages were either "fictive" or politically motivated. He did not mention my criticism of him to his readers, and *Le Monde* never published my reply. But how could I prosecute a journal that did so much to make my own investigative work in France possible? Next time, I'll follow the example of Colombani, Minc, and Plenel. The bad smell in this book isn't due only to the garbage that should have been dumped before publication. *Le Monde* is not quite as bad as the authors say, but that isn't much of a compliment. We who live in France have lost a public good, and God knows when we will get it back. ■

*During his twenty-one years in France, Mark Hunter has either written about, competed with, and/or written for Pierre Péan, Edwy Plenel, and Le Monde. This year he won an Investigative Reporters and Editors award for international reporting.*

## CJR BOOK REPORTS

BY JAMES BOYLAN

### PICTURING POVERTY: PRINT CULTURE AND FSA PHOTOGRAPHS

By Cara A. Finnegan  
Smithsonian Books  
260 pp. \$36.95

The FSA photographs — the images of rural poverty in the Great Depression produced by the photographers of the "Historical Section" of the federal Farm Security Administration — Ben Shahn, Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and others — have been anthologized and exhibited for decades and have become part of the national heritage. Now Cara A. Finnegan, a specialist in the history of images at the University of Illinois, goes back to the beginning, to ask how these now-familiar photographs were seen and understood in their own time. She examines their publication in three periodicals: First, in *Survey Graphic*, an earnest publication with a long history of examining social conditions and recommending solutions; it offered the photographs thematically, to illustrate talking points. Second, in *U.S. Camera*, a glossy annual compiled primarily by Edward Steichen, full-page reproductions offered the photographs primarily as documentary art, usually with no caption beyond the name of the photographer. Third, in the then-new picture magazine, *Look*, the photographs were mangled and squeezed into quasi-news layouts — for example, in an extended story using them to illustrate excerpts from John Steinbeck's saga of rural migration, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Finnegan discusses each of these uses intelligently, always making the point that the individuality of the destitute Americans portrayed shone through, regardless of format.

### FRONT-PAGE WOMEN JOURNALISTS, 1920-1950

By Kathleen A. Cairns  
University of Nebraska Press  
182 pp. \$45

**F**ront-Page Women Journalists contains brief, dense biographies of three journalists, prefaced by an introduction chronicling women's

gradual entry into general (as opposed to "women's") news work between the World Wars. Ruth Finney (1898-1979), a tenacious Washington correspondent for the Scripps Howard News Alliance, may have been the first woman nominated for a Pulitzer Prize (1931), for her coverage of utilities scandals. The progress of her career is illuminated by candid excerpts from her diary. For example, when Scripps Howard cooled on the New Deal and she did not, she wrote: "My services are less and less in demand since everyone understands I won't do jobs I don't believe in." The second biography is that of Charlotta Bass (1880?-1969), whose newspaper, the *California Eagle*, of Los Angeles, agitated over four decades for racial equality. Outspoken and increasingly radical, she fought lynching, the Ku Klux Klan, wartime employment discrimination, and restrictive covenants; in 1952, she earned a footnote in political history as vice-presidential candidate for the left-wing Progressive Party. The third, Agness Underwood (1902-1984) of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald and Express*, was cut in the classic mold of the hard-nosed crime reporter. She often outdid men, partly because as a woman she got extraordinary access to newsworthy women on trial for spectacular murders. Promoted to city editor in 1947, during the (still unsolved) Black Dahlia case, she earned the loyalty of her staff, which she repaid by resigning in 1968 rather than cross their picket line.

### ORANGE JOURNALISM: VOICES FROM FLORIDA NEWSPAPERS

By Julian M. Pleasants  
University Press of Florida  
342 pp. \$27.95

**O**ral history as reading matter, as opposed to source material, can be cumbersome, and this collection is no exception. But it has its rewards. The project was a joint effort of the Florida Press Association and the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida, of which Julian M. Pleasants is the director. The fifteen interviews here offer a cross-section of recent Florida journalism. The subjects range in eminence from Al Neuharth,

quizzed on the Florida origins of *USA Today*, to the weekly publisher, Tommy Greene, known among other things for always dressing in green. The interviews with entrepreneurs and editors are best when they concentrate on individual careers, but too much space is used in answers to routine questions, such as what the interviewee happens to think of *USA Today*. Among the most stimulating are the dialogues with writers — Carl Hassen, iconoclastic columnist for *The Miami Herald* (and novelist); Lucy Morgan, Pulitzer Prize-winning capital bureau chief for the *St. Petersburg Times*; and Rick Bragg of *The New York Times*, whose account of how he came to the *Times* casts at least a little light on his recent departure.

### BROADWAY BOOGIE WOOGIE: DAMON RUNYON AND THE MAKING OF NEW YORK CITY CULTURE

By Daniel R. Schwarz  
Palgrave Macmillan  
346 pp. \$35

**D**amon Runyon (1880-1946) survives, not because he is much read any more but because his name and its spin-off, the argot called "Runyonese," evoke a perhaps mythical Manhattan occupied by amusing, sometimes violent or greedy perps. Daniel R. Schwarz, a professor of English at Cornell University, reexamines the whole of Runyon's flood of writing, from his first newspaper days in Pueblo, Colorado, to his death after long years as a productive and dutiful Hearstling. Schwarz is most effective in, for example, his handling of such topics as "A. Mugg," the name Runyon offered as the putative author of his column when he was developing the arch, pseudo-formal voice that became Runyonese. Schwarz also tries to place Runyon in a broader canvas of "New York city culture," but here the discussion seems slightly off-key, much like the title, which is derived from a 1942-1943 Mondrian painting. Runyon may have been ragtime or jazz, but definitely not boogie-woogie.

*James Boylan is the founding editor of CJR and professor emeritus of journalism and history at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.*

# CJR VOICES

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DAVID SUTER

VOICES, funded in part by the Ford Foundation, offers independent viewpoints on a variety of subjects. CJR welcomes contributions. You may submit manuscripts to the locations listed on page 4.

## American Idol

*The press finds the war's true meaning*



### BY CHRISTOPHER HANSON

According to prewar news coverage, Gulf War II was about smashing an al Qaeda stronghold, capturing weapons of mass destruction, and liberating a subjugated people. Judging by what received the greatest media attention, however, the war turned out to be as much as anything about the rescue of POW Jessica Lynch, the spunky but delicate, God-fearing West Virginian who braved bullets to be able to afford her dreams of college and kindergarten teaching.

Central casting could hardly have contrived a better symbol of wholesome small-town values and American purity. "For many Americans . . . the face of Gulf War II will forever be the smiling young woman under the camo-colored Army cap against the background of an American flag," the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* reported, without evident irony, in the lead sentence of an April 13 front-page news article.

Providing reporters with colorful details and dramatic night-scope footage, Central Command in Qatar helped turn Private Lynch's fate into a blockbuster suspense story with a happy ending. Other informants added juicy details, many first reported in *The Washington Post*. According to that paper's widely quoted narrative, Lynch, nineteen, fought desperately, shot enemy soldiers, and was badly wounded when the Iraqis captured her on March 23. In a prison hospital, she was beaten sadistically by an Iraqi goon — then snatched from her bed in a daring April 1 commando raid.

As the Lynch rescue story broke, the press was preoccupied with such questions as, Where is Saddam? Where are his weapons of mass destruction? And why didn't our generals anticipate guerrilla-style Iraqi attacks? But Jessica, the plucky supply clerk, drew attention away from those disturbing matters as news media instantly elevated her to the status of cultural icon. Lynch was so much in demand that CBS News raised the prospect of book, movie, and TV deals with other Viacom divisions if only she would talk on camera. There was even a semiotic analysis on *The New York Times* op-ed page by an American studies professor, arguing that Lynch's saga descends in part from an account by Hannah Dunston — a Haverhill, Massachusetts, captive who scalped ten Abenaki Indians in 1697.

In the fourteen days after her rescue, Lynch drew 919 references in major papers, according to a Nexis search. In that same period, General Tommy Franks, who ran the war, got 639 references, Vice President Dick Cheney 549, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz 389. She stood with the giants.

Now that we have some distance, it's worth considering why her emotional saga drew so much ink and air and what its impact was. The Jessica legend made troubling times more encompassable at the expense of skeptical reporting and clear thinking. It also reinforced some antiquated ideas about military women.

Understanding the Jessica frenzy inevitably sends us back to September

Christopher Hanson is a contributing editor to CJR. A print reporter for twenty years, he wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on press coverage of women in the military.



11, 2001. Since that day's terrorist attacks, the public, the press, and our national leadership have struggled mightily to make sense of a very disquieting world. The Bush administration wasted no time after 9/11 in publicly linking the terror threat with Saddam Hussein's Iraq. By one theory, the White House's impulse — perhaps unconscious — was to provide the public, the press, and even itself with a simpler, less disturbing, more emotionally satisfying reality in which evil-doers can be vanquished. The Iraq army, after all, would not be hard to find or to wipe out.

But when the United States finally launched its invasion, that story line did not unfold neatly. Neither a link between Saddam and Osama bin Laden nor Iraqi weapons of mass destruction materialized. Although the Pentagon drummed the idea that our mission was to liberate the Iraqi people, many Iraqis saw our troops as unwelcome.

But before doubts could fester, the Lynch rescue story broke. It was a p.r. windfall for the military, the first successful rescue of a U.S. POW behind enemy lines since World War II. The announcement was a godsend to the press corps, which loves "firsts," lives for "people" stories, and goes crazy over any rescue. Reporters at last could deliver the straightforward, emotionally fulfilling saga of good beating evil that America expects.

Never mind that Lynch was unavailable for comment (and reported to have amnesia). Never mind that reporters would have to paper over big holes to deliver a coherent narrative.

■ **Lynch's capture.** *The Washington Post* reported that Lynch was shot during the ambush but dealt death in return, fighting to the last bullet in her M-16 (April 3, page A1). Headlined SHE WAS FIGHTING TO THE DEATH, the anonymously sourced story read like a Hollywood script and in fact bore an uncanny resemblance to a climactic scene in the Gulf War I film, *Courage Under Fire*. Unable to confirm the story, major news outlets nonetheless picked it up as a crucial piece of the narrative. But ten weeks later, the *Post* acknowledged that the "waiflike" Lynch did not fight to the death and might not even have fired her M-16, which jammed. Her "bone crushing" injuries were from a Humvee crash, and Iraqi doctors saved her life. The June 17 A1 article begins as a feature updating Lynch's condition. Only after the jump does it reveal itself to be the journalistic equivalent of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

■ **Lynch's mistreatment.** In a separate April 4, page-one article, *The Washington Post* took at face value the account of a self-promoting Iraqi lawyer named Mohammed, who "risked all" to help rescue Lynch after seeing a security thug dressed in black slapping and backhanding her as she lay helpless in her hospital bed. The lawyer and his wife, a nurse at the hospital, helped U.S. forces plan the rescue. Again, other news outlets picked up the story. And again, the *Post* developed late-breaking doubts. In its June



17 piece, the paper quoted Iraqi doctors as denying Lynch had been slapped or that Mohammed's wife had worked at the hospital. By then, the Samaritan had political asylum and a fat book contract.

■ **Lynch's liberation.** Relying on military sources, the press reported a dangerous operation involving a diversionary firefight as Task Force 20 swooped down, kicked in doors, set off stun grenades, and shackled Iraqis. The unit's mission had been to seize weapons of mass destruction. At least they seized Jessica.

But on May 15, a revisionist BBC report aired interviews with Iraqi doctors who said no Iraqi troops had been in the hospital during the raid and they had been trying for days to release Lynch to U.S. Marines. NBC News, *Time*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and other American outlets began raising questions as well.

Like the *Post*, they certainly took their time. Journalists are disinclined to puncture "feel good" stories, especially those that they themselves have sent aloft.

Beyond questions of accuracy, the press's Lynch binge created two problems. First, it helped emotionalize and confuse the question of why we are in Iraq. Given the torrent of celebratory coverage when she was rescued, and the patriotic rejoicing this inspired at home, her liberation almost seemed to affirm the intervention itself. Yes, she needed her freedom only because Americans were in Iraq in the first place. And yes, the original rationales for this adventure were increasingly open to doubt. But why rain on the homecoming parade?

Second, this coverage lynched the image of the American woman in uniform, perpetuating a pattern of distorted reporting set out in these pages last year (See "Women Warriors," *CJR*, May/June 2002). As in Gulf War I, when two female America POWs drew massive, disproportionate coverage, news media bombarded the audience with a tale of female vulnerability in 2003. Lynch was described hiding under the sheets as her rescuers burst in, clinging to a military doctor's hand and pleading, "Don't let anybody leave me."

Such a heavy focus on one vulnerable woman can only have warped the overall picture. Male U.S. soldiers also were captured, but their plight and liberation got much less attention. Meanwhile, thousands of other American women were making history performing bravely under fire in jobs that were once off limits. The public heard less about them than about the broken bones of Jessica Lynch, damsel in distress. Her dramatic rescue was very likely the one memory most Americans had carried away from the war with Iraq. How awkward to have to tell them she was a truck crash victim saved by the enemy and not actually rescued by the same commando unit that did not actually find those elusive weapons of mass destruction. But that's what happens when you write first and ask questions later. ■

# Parallel Universe at the *Times*

*WMDs in Iraq? It depends on whose story you read.*



**BY LIZA FEATHERSTONE**

For much of the spring, *The New York Times* seemed to inhabit parallel universes on the matter of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, possibly the most important factual question of the year. In nearly a dozen stories by the senior writer Judith Miller, such weapons were just about to be found

or had recently been destroyed. Yet *Times* editorials and stories on the subject by other reporters were careful not to suggest any such thing. Reached by e-mail as she was on deadline — writing another story about weapons of mass destruction — Miller indignantly disputed such a description of her work. “Have you bothered to read what I filed?” she asked.

Well, yes. The file shows that every few days from late April through May, any *Times* reader interested in the WMD issue might be puzzled. For example:

■ On April 21, Miller wrote a page-one piece about an “Iraqi scientist” who, according to her military sources, said that Saddam Hussein’s government had destroyed biological and chemical weapons days before the war began. She had not been allowed to speak to him but was “permitted to see him from a distance,” she wrote, as he pointed to spots in the sand where he said “chemical precursors and other weapons” material were buried. The story said that the American team claimed to have dug up such precursors based on the scientist’s information, which members described as “the most important discovery to date” in the hunt for WMDs. Two days later, the *Times* editorial page, with no mention of Miller’s findings, declared it “no small matter” that no weapons had “yet been found.”

■ On May 8, Miller quoted anonymous Bush administration officials as suggesting strongly that a tractor-trailer truck in Iraq had to be a biological weapons lab: “If it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it has to be a duck,” one said. The thrust of the story was that the lab was indeed a duck — a weapons lab. Three days later, William J. Broad, a science writer for the *Times*, reported that WMDs had not “yet come to light.” No mention of the Miller scoop.

■ Miller reported, on May 11, TRAILER IS A MOBILE LAB CAPABLE OF TURNING OUT BIOWEAPONS, A TEAM SAYS, with one source calling the finding a “smoking gun” in the weapons search. Two days later, a *Times* editor-

ial acknowledged the government claim and thus, implicitly, Miller’s reporting, but concluded that “the search for the large stocks of chemical and biological weapons . . . has yet to turn up anything significant.” The implication: Miller’s scoop was not “significant.”

It became difficult for a reader to avoid concluding that the WMDs-in-Iraq issue had divided not only the United Nations but the *Times*. Indeed, a *Times* reporter who has worked in the region and who has asked not to be identified confirmed that people in the Iraq bureau were frustrated with Miller’s stories because she seemed to keep coming to “the same conclusions” even when there seemed to be “no evidence for them.” Miller, the reporter explained, reported not to the bureau, but to editors in New York. Meanwhile, according to a network TV journalist who covered the recent storm inside the *Times*, reporters who met with publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. specifically complained to him about Miller’s WMD coverage. And the *Washington Post*’s media reporter, Howard Kurtz, revealed — via a leaked e-mail exchange between Miller and the *Times*’s Baghdad bureau chief, John Burns — that Miller, by her own admission, relied on Ahmad Chalabi, a controversial former exile, for “most of the front-page exclusives on WMD.” Burns declined to comment for this story.

Assistant managing editor Andrew Rosenthal argues that “there is no contradiction” between Miller’s reporting and the rest of the paper. Miller had been “embedded” with a U.S. weapons inspection team, he says, and was reporting on what members of that team were saying, not presenting their claims as fact. “When she was no longer embedded, she was able to develop different sources,” says Rosenthal. (By late May, two stories that were more skeptical about WMDs in Iraq appeared under Miller’s byline, along with that of Broad.) Embedding, Rosenthal says, is a tradeoff.

Indeed. On May 20, Miller gave the commencement speech at Barnard College, her alma mater. She urged the graduates to be skeptical about the given reasons for the war on Iraq, and particularly of government claims about WMDs. About embedding, she said that journalists “need to draw conclusions about whether journalistic objectivity was compromised . . . whether the country’s interests were best served by this arrangement.” ■

Liza Featherstone is a journalist based in New York.

# Everything That Rises

*Media convergence is an opportunity, not a curse*



**BY JANET KOLODZY**

**T**he fear of Big Media has overpowered much of the debate on cross-ownership of newspapers and television in local markets. But the issue isn't who owns the media; it's what those owners do with it. Journalists tend to believe in competition, but when we stop to consider,

competition hasn't always brought diversity and quality in news. Convergence can — if done right.

Convergence means cooperative relationships between television, online, and print media. In places where this already exists, good journalism still flourishes. In some cities, local or regional cable news networks have developed relationships with newspapers, and diversity of opinion hasn't suffered.

Yet some critics equate convergence with a loss of jobs, heavier workloads for journalists, and monolithic news and opinion. They see it as the manifestation of the dark side of media consolidation. Convergence can indeed be all those things, if journalists let it.

But convergence can also harness the benefits of online, broadcast, and print to provide news to people when and where they want it. Few people get their news from one source anymore. Just look at all the ways people got news about the war in Iraq. They used TV for immediacy, online for diversity, and print for context. Journalism's adaptation to that fragmentation has been sluggish. Convergence is one way to keep up.

So far, television and the Internet have reaped the biggest benefits of convergence. Hundreds of print reporters operate in major cities with only handfuls of television reporters and few, if any, online reporters. With convergence, TV and the Internet get the depth of reporting and expertise that newspapers offer. In exchange, newspapers reach people who would never buy a newspaper, let alone subscribe to one.

Example: *The Hartford Courant* collaborates with a Fox affiliate. The Tribune Company, which owns the *Courant* and WTIC Fox 61, has placed its own stamp on convergence. Instead of trying to turn its print reporters into TV journalists, the *Courant* hired a television producer, Ellen Burns, to turn newspaper stories into TV stories. One example: reports on how New York's Cardinal Edward Egan handled priest sex-abuse cases when he was the bishop in Bridgeport,

Connecticut. While the *Courant* wrote its reports, Burns packaged them for Fox 61. Instead of a weak, hurriedly produced and day-late TV story, WTIC viewers saw a well-researched, quality report. The TV version also was aired in New York, and the *Courant* piece made it into *Newsday*, both Tribune properties. More people learned of the story in different ways. The winner: the public.

Meanwhile, local and regional cable news networks have succeeded by using the depth of newspaper reporting to bring more government watchdogging and analysis to television. Newspaper reporters realize the reach of television when they go on the regional cable news networks to talk about their stories or to provide analysis.

Convergence's unfulfilled potential is in redistributing reporting resources. Watching dozens of media organizations descend on West Warwick, Rhode Island, after the recent deadly nightclub fire left me wondering about all the other wasted reporting opportunities. After the first day, all those reporters kept repeating the same two basic stories: who was to blame, and how the survivors and victims' families were faring. Convergence could have freed up some of those reporters to pursue investigative or other angles, providing some diversity and depth.

The key is to play to the strengths of each medium, and to respect those strengths. We saw some of that in the war with Iraq. *New York Times* reporters provided updates on CNN and PBS, adding depth and nuance. We heard the *Los Angeles Times* on NPR or someone from MSNBC on *Imus in the Morning*. NBC and Fox News reporters were filing Weblogs. The war tested the ingenuity of news organizations to manage resources to get the most diverse coverage.

But convergence, clearly, can be mismanaged. As one Tampa reporter put it, "We need managers who know the value of all media so that this new tactic can be harnessed properly." A carbon copy of a story in print, online, and on television doesn't cut it. Nor does a single perspective.

Journalists can devote their energy to debate the red herring of cross-ownership or they can channel it to make convergence work. ■

**Janet Kolodzy, a journalism professor at Emerson College, split a twenty-year career between print and broadcast.**

# Doing Justice to Jail Time

*How not to report about sentencing*



A breaking development in one of the most closely watched trials of 2002 dominated the cable news shows last November 4. "Jury Reaches Verdict in Winona Ryder Case," proclaimed the caption that ran for hours on CNN. "If Convicted She Could Face Three Years in Prison."

**BY MARK THOMPSON**

Close variations on that second statement had appeared by then in dozens of news stories about the actress caught shoplifting in Beverly Hills. The reports that mentioned the potential sentence might as well have added that Ryder "could get hit by a meteorite." Both statements would have been true, though the chance of either outcome was virtually nil.

While reporters are instinctively wary of speculation about extraterrestrial objects, fantastic overstatements about prospective criminal sentences have been a staple of mainstream news for years. The truth eventually comes out when sentences are handed down. Ryder, for one, was ordered to pay restitution and do community service, a reasonable disposition for a first shoplifting offense. But the press isn't doing the public any favors by routinely passing on grossly exaggerated statements about how much prison time a defendant could get.

The problem is endemic in reporting about criminal cases ranging from world-famous to mundane. The boxer Mike Tyson "faces a maximum prison sentence of sixty-three years" for a 1991 date rape. He serves three. The junk-bond king Michael Milken "faces a staggering maximum prison term of 520 years" for his 1989 indictment on ninety-eight counts of racketeering, insider trading, and fraud. He's out in two. Michael Frechette "faces up to eight years in prison" for running a bingo scam in Indianapolis. He gets probation.

The pattern is repeating itself in cases that are now in pretrial proceedings. The American pilots who mistakenly dropped a bomb that killed four Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan, for example, "face up to sixty-four years in military prison if convicted of all charges," stories about that case routinely say without even hinting that such a prison term isn't remotely possible for carelessness in combat.

Reporters aren't making up the big numbers. They can be derived by toting up the maximum term for each count in an indictment. Prosecutors usually are

more than happy to do the math, often conveniently listing the maximum potential sentence in press releases. The staggering numbers serve their purpose by sobering up defendants, helping induce guilty pleas. But credulous reporting of those numbers by the press leaves the public in the dark about the sentences that offenders realistically face.

The conspicuous lack of truth in reporting about sentencing has even helped push disillusioned members of the public to take matters into their own hands. A popular uprising against sentencing laws has swept across the nation in the past decade, winning passage of tough mandatory minimum sentences, rigid sentencing guidelines, and "truth in sentencing" laws that require violent offenders to remain behind bars for at least 85 percent of any prison sentence. As the argument in favor of a truth-in-sentencing initiative on the ballot in Oregon in 1999 explained, "The intent here is that the victim, the press and the public are entitled to know the *reality* of the imposed sentence rather than believing some announced number of months that may have little connection to what is actually served."

Paradoxically, the sentencing reforms have saddled many states with sentences that are now irrationally harsh, and prison budgets are rising inexorably. In desperation, more than half the states are scrambling to cut sentences for some offenses and some jails and prisons have been forced to make wholesale early releases of nonviolent inmates.

Injecting some truth in reporting about sentencing isn't going to produce a more rational criminal-justice system overnight. But it will produce a more informed electorate. And it won't take much effort on the part of the press.

Consider, for example, the case of WorldCom's former chief financial officer Scott Sullivan. Last September, newspaper readers were told that he "faces a total of twenty-five years in prison if convicted of all counts." While that stretched credulity, reports a few months later shattered it. After prosecutors added new charges, one newspaper reported, "Officially, he now faces 185 years in prison." In that story, the reporter added a caveat, which should be standard practice in reporting about potential sentences. "Any sentence would likely be far less under federal sentencing guidelines." ■

**Mark Thompson, a veteran legal-affairs reporter, is a free-lance writer in Los Angeles.**



You're Looking At

# The Prescription Painkiller Capital Of The U.S.

Photo: Jahi Chikwendiu, Lexington Herald-Leader

These are the beautiful mountains of Eastern Kentucky. Here in this rural splendor the Lexington Herald-Leader uncovered an ugly truth: On a per capita basis, Eastern Kentucky drug stores, hospitals and other legal outlets received more prescription painkillers than anywhere else in the nation.

The newspaper's unprecedented analysis of federal data revealed that nearly half a ton of narcotics made its way to seven small mountain counties between 1998 and

2001 — the equivalent of 3,000 milligrams for every adult living there. (A typical pill might contain 10 to 20 milligrams.)

Those drugs begin as legal medicines, but many are diverted into illegal sales and abuse, according to the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

"A state police captain says that for every prescription-drug dealer his officers take off the small-town streets, four replacements are ready to take over. A public defender in Perry County estimates that 95 percent of his clients either sell or abuse prescription drugs. Eastern Kentucky circuit court dockets are jammed; possession and trafficking charges related to all controlled substances jumped 348 percent from 1997 through 2001," the Herald-Leader reports.

The newspaper's seven-part series, "Prescription for Pain," examined how the system encourages illegal drug use. Through its investigative efforts, the Herald-Leader exposed myriad related issues contributing to the problem — from long waiting lists at residential drug treatment centers to corruption in local law enforcement agencies, lengthy crime lab backlogs and overloaded court dockets.

We congratulate the Herald-Leader for exceptional reporting that has brought to light a problem called the first "addiction epidemic" started in a rural area.

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# THE SPYMASTER GETS A PASS

BY JASON VEST

**There used to be** something vaguely inspiring to me about the idea of confirmation hearings. They seemed to hold the promise of journalistic nobility: not only might a reporter bear witness to constitutional process, but he or she might also scrutinize nominees and issues for the public good. Unfortunately, this notion has been trumped in recent years by the press's embrace of a conventional wisdom that holds that the president should be able to choose whomever he wants for whatever position, and so the examination should be perfunctory.

There are, of course, exceptions: the nomination of federal judges can always have serious *sturm-und-drang* showdown potential. The controversial Otto Reich might have provided a serious hearing if the administration hadn't found a way around it last year. But considerations for positions in the national security apparatus — so invigorated, post-9/11 — are now more or less rubber-stamp affairs for both legislators and reporters. For example, when Christina Rocca was appointed to the State Department in 2001, no senator or journalist asked her, let alone mentioned, anything about her fifteen-year Central Intelligence Agency career. Yet even by that standard, things hit a new low on February 27.

On that day, the Senate Armed Services Committee convened to question the political appointee who would have responsibility for orchestrating what may be the most ambitious, if not ominous, consolidation of power in U.S. intelligence community history. In anticipation of this event, I scanned the wires and watched the channels for days before, during, and after. If anyone from the press showed up to cover the confirmation hearing, there was no evidence of it. Indeed, there was virtually no mention of the event anywhere in the media.

Nominated to fill the position of undersecretary of defense for intelligence, Stephen A. Cambone — a Rumsfeld loyalist rising rapidly through the Defense Department's senior ranks — didn't even merit the undivided attention of his overseers, but was wedged in with nominees for subcabinet positions in the Energy and Army departments.

That was more than a little troubling. The gist of Cambone's brief turn before the committee essentially boiled down to this: Trust me, just because I'm going to be the first person to have direct control over every defense intelligence agency — NSA, NRO, NIMA, DIA, etc. — and their budgets; even though I work for a secretary with a well-documented history of Machiavellian power plays; even though I'm part of a clique with a reputation for seeking the intelligence analysis that meshes with its ideological goals — I certainly won't be a competitor to the director of Central Intelligence.

Cambone was essentially sent on his way with a pat on the head, and subsequently confirmed — again, with no substantial notice in the press — on March 7.

By the time *The New York Times* acknowledged Cambone's new billet as Rumsfeld's intelligencer in the April 11 issue, the newly minted undersecretary was full of muscularly cryptic comments. Had the Pentagon hawks politicized intelligence in the push for war with Iraq, the *Times* asked? "Any policy maker has certain views," Cambone said. "Policy makers are where they are and doing



what they do because they have a view." If there was a follow-up exchange seeking clarification, it wasn't included in the story. The *Times* went on to quote Cambone as saying his job was "not to shape" analyses, but to properly direct work. Any real difference between "shape" and direct? Either not fit to print or not fit to ask.

All this was reminiscent of Cambone's hearing (along with other interested parties, I pored over the transcript as soon it was available), in which restrained questioning by the senators and creative use of language by Cambone left much open to interpretation. In search of clarity, I rustled up Cambone's answers to a prehearing questionnaire put to him by the committee staff. That document was far more illuminating.

Explaining his job as "exercising authority, direction and control" of all Pentagon intelligence, Cambone said that he would have total responsibility for all information to be "collected, analyzed, and distributed," as well as the "conduct" of buffed-up "counter-intelligence operations." In the questionnaire, Cambone further noted the need for database sharing between his intelligence operations and civilian law enforcement, a move that is sure to give constitutionalists pause. He wrote of the desirability of disseminating certain intelligence analysis "without source attribution." And he discussed how he would "consult, and coordinate . . . to ensure DoD-related intelligence activity supports the goals" of Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Doug Feith, to whom he would "ensure timely delivery of intelligence information." (Critics call Feith's directorate the home of all manner of hidden and ideologically motivated efforts since 9/11.)

Over the past couple of months, I've had numerous conversations with retired and active intelligence officers (military and civilian), staff people from watchdog nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the intelligence community, intelligence scholars, and some congressional staff members. All agree that the new intelligence undersecretary at the Pentagon is not only someone who bears watching, particularly in a time when recent intelligence has been suspect, but that, judging from the coverage surrounding his confirmation, the press couldn't care less. ■

Jason Vest reports on national security affairs for *The Nation* and *The Village Voice*.



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AP/WIDEWORLD/CEMMA HERBERT

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## Devil Rays sign Parque, outfielder



**Possible woman  
didn't know she  
was pregnant,  
witness testifies**

*Daily Freeman (Kingston, N.Y.) 5/13/03*

**Scool  
boasts  
7 Merit  
Scholars**

*The Capital Times  
(Madison, Wis.) 5/1/02*

*The Herald (Everett, Wash.) 1/21/03*

## Suicide Bombing Kills 3

**Palestinian Prime  
Minister Approved**

*Albuquerque (N.Mex.) Journal 4/30/03*

**More Teens  
Get Shot at  
Advanced  
Classes**

*The Washington Post 5/21/03*

**Four top dogs inducted into  
meat industry hall of fame**

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 5/1/03*

**A former POW dies near Del Rio  
while testing a groundbreaking  
new corporate jet**

*San Antonio Express-News 4/28/03*

**Residents Of Nursing Homes Are Excited By News Of Family Affairs**

*The Post-Journal (Jamestown, N.Y.) 4/1/03*

**Hatred aging plotter's companion**

*Tulsa World 6/8/03*

**Town Manager  
Widdles Tax Rate**

*The Suburban News (Windham, Maine) 4/24/03*

***For Mayor and Council, Baby Steps Toward Budget Deal***

*The New York Times 4/29/03*

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